



# *Waves of Fate*

A ROMANCE

BY

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'THE EDGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE'

"A man whom both the waters and the wind,  
In that vast tennis-court, hath made the ball  
For them to play upon."

—*Pericles*, Act ii. sc. 1.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MCMV



TO

*COULSON KERNAHAN,*

*IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF  
A WORD WHICH BROUGHT HOPE AT A  
TIME WHEN ONE FORESAW FAILURE.*





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# WAVES OF FATE.

## ACT I.—ON THE HIGH SEAS.

### CHAPTER I.

*CACOETHES SCRIBENDI.*

"Coo-ee, . . . Ethel!" cried a voice.

"Ye-es," came sleepily from the silent deck.

• "Spare a minute—can you?"

Mrs Norris put down her book, and, rising from the long cane lounge beneath the awning, came through the chart-room and entered the after-cabin.

• A wide, semicircular space confronted her, and in a swivel-chair sat Captain Norris in the white tunic suit of the tropics. On the settee beside him lay the topee he had cast aside on commencing work, on the table before him lay a great sheaf of MS., and overflowing the table loose sheets strewed the deck.

Gr-r-r-r-r! S-s-s-swish-h-h-h-h! came sorrowfully from the rudder-trunk, carrying a hint of the energy imprisoned and chafing within the cylinder—Uble-uble-uble-eoon . . . Gr-r-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r-r! The great steel rudder jerked on the gimbals, thrilling the stern-sheets as the ship lifted and swayed in the swell. But Norris paid no attention to these sounds. He was engrossed, amazingly engrossed, with the words written there on the last page of the MS.

lying before him on the table. And as Mrs Norris entered, he looked up waving his pen—

"Maskee! Have done!" he cried, beckoning her to him. "The end—Finis; and now for home and the Post Office—eh, what?"

Ethel sat down on the settee beside him. "That's right," she decided. "Yes, I am glad it is done—and now for success, Arthur. More success than last time."

Norris cowered at the words. A chill seemed to creep over him.

"Success," he grumbled, "Ummm! I believe that is all you think of, Ethel. Good gracious, why if I dreamt of that kind of thing I should never write a line."

"Well; but I should like it to be successful,\* dear—wouldn't you? Come now."

He looked at the fair girl sitting there so calmly, and pushing his fingers through his hair said, "Well, yes, it would be good; but honestly, I would rather hear it spoken of by the men who know."

"Can't it be both?" she questioned lazily.

"It rarely is," he decided.

There was a short silence at this, Ethel glancing over his shoulder and reading the concluding lines on the sheet still spread before him—

"And out of the greyness came a small white bird—a bird that has no song, no cry of joy, only a short mournful note, piercing, insistent. And it danced over the rollers far down there in the south, and came to the place where he lay, eyes set wide, to watch the bay. It circled about him, fearless, touching him with the tip of its soft, white wing . . ."

"She read no farther, but looked up swiftly, saying, "Oh, but Arthur, that is tragedy—you haven't made it end unhappily after all?"

"Inevitable," he returned. "Such a life must end in tragedy. A happy ending would make the thing a farce, melodramatic, impossible."

Ethel offered no response, but her husband saw disapproval written in the beautiful eyes, and turned on her with—"You must admit such an ending would be in the

highest degree improbable. Why, look at the characteristics, look at the man's bent—it all marches to tragedy. Given such conditions, he could never win through. Come now, look at it fairly."

"That is what you said of your first book," she reminded him, "but one of your critics decided it was 'all so unnecessary,' you remember?"

"The Daily Gusher.' One only," he exclaimed. "To tell the truth, I don't care two brass pins what they say in a paper of that description. What did the majority say—'The Bookman,' 'Chronicle,' 'Times,' 'Post,' even that slater of new men, 'The Spec . . .'; very well, then, I take no heed of the others. Not a peg."

"My dear Arthur, don't get vexed. I only thought from what you said that you would try to work it round as I wanted you to—and . . ."

"Pfaugh! I am not vexed, old girl. I only want you to see the thing as I see it, and . . ."

"Can't," Ethel decided shaking her head, lips closed, eyes dancing.

"Won't," he mocked, catching her by the shoulders and staring into the face so capriciously levelled at his. "Won't—do you hear?"

"The necessity of all endeavour is success," she told him. "You know it."

"Success!" he returned moodily; "tcha! you remind me of Pope's cynicism—

'Get place and wealth, if possible with grace,  
If not, by any means get wealth and place.'

He moved away and paced the room slowly, head bent, hands thrust deep in pockets. Ethel watched him some minutes in silence, then noting that this time, at all events, the mood was lasting, rose and took his arm—

"Did-ums hurt its vanity?" she cooed, laughing and peering into the still dark face. Then suddenly putting one arm round his neck, head thrown back, lips framed for kisses, "Laugh!" she commanded. "Twick! Laugh, . . . Or I shall . . ."

•And the muscles relaxed, the frowning eye showed

signs of obedience, and in another minute Arthur Norris had forgotten his annoyance and stood holding his wife in his arms—

"You don't deserve it," she announced triumphantly.

"I know it," he admitted. "I am a brute."

"You are my husband!" she threatened, finger in air.

"Your husband has a beast of a temper," he assured her, laughing. "He has the temper of . . ."

She stopped him with kisses.

"Of . . ." he essayed, struggling, "of . . ."

She held her lips to his—"No," she cried. "I won't hear it. I won't—won't."

He admitted there was no occasion to point the phrase, and sat back on the settee, Ethel triumphantly cooing her victory. And to them, with the suddenness of an avalanche, came a pair of small children, banging the door, eager, and shouting in unison—

Jacky: "Oh, please, dad, there's a ship coming."

Claire: "A mailboat, Mr Cals'on says it is."

Jacky: "An' it's goin' home—an' it's got two funnels—an' lots of smoke—an' a green bottom—an' barque-rigged."

Claire: "An' Mr Cals'on says it's a Pacific . . ."

Both: "An' will you please come up, dad."

Norris was on his feet before the children had finished speaking. "How far off, old chap?" he questioned, touching the boy's curls.

"Hull down, dad."

Captain Norris hastened through the saloon and was on deck examining the distant speck through his telescope before the trio could join him. He turned round as they approached and balanced the glass for Ethel to see—"Chief's right," he announced. "A homeward-bound Pacific boat. By Jove! I will."

"Will what?" Ethel questioned demurely, struggling with the long glass.

"Send my book home."

"Can you?"

"Rather."

The *Coorong* was in the doldrums, at the halting place of all sailing-ships, waiting for the push that should send

her rippling into the North Atlantic trades. Mainsail and crossjack were "hailed up," staysails tripped, but the lighter sails were spread and banging lazily, as the ship rolled in the swell. A scorching day: clear as crystal, water a deep translucent blue, sky cloudless, and about the horizon patches of purple cloud melting sleepily into the soft blue dome.

Norris gazed at the symbols lying so restfully in sea and sky, then turned away, and approaching the chief, said, "Get your signal halliards and flags all ready. I am going to speak her. She will pass close—eh, what?"

"Coming down right on end, sir," Calston returned unruffled.

"Right. I thought so, . . . Um-m! . . . I believe we could do with a taste of fresh meat and a few vegetables, eh, Calston?"

"I am sure Mrs Norris and the youngsters could, sir."

"And you, Calston—and the hands?"

"Well, yes; I don't deny it. We're eighty days out," the chief admitted, cautiously fingering his beard.

"Good. Then I'll stand Sam, . . . er . . . this is a sort of birthday of mine, you see; . . . er . . . yes, and just get the gig ready, and let me know when she's within a couple of miles."

He turned away, hurried to his room, and sitting down wrote as follows:—

"Ship Coorong, Sept. 15th, 19—  
At Sea. Lat. 2° 45' N. Long. 30° 5' W.

"DEAR SIRs,—A passing mailboat enables me to send the MS. enclosed herewith, which I have called 'Frayed Seams,' for your perusal. I am hoping that you may be able to undertake its publication on the same lines as my last book.

"MSS. reach you doubtless by many strange agencies and from many strange places—but this, posted in the doldrums, where we are lying waiting for the breeze that shall run us home, is perhaps as strange a place as any. A dead calm. Sea oily, sun blazing—and you in England probably shivering over the fires. Can I think it will prove a good omen?—Faithfully yours,

"ARTHUR



This letter he placed with the MS., and packing the whole in an old chart of the North Atlantic, addressed it to a firm of publishers whose offices lie in a street not far from the Strand. A moment later he was again on deck, and had joined the group by the rail.

The mailship approached swiftly, a giant of the seas, picked out in black and white, funnels belching the dark-brown smoke of South American mines, a ribbon of green broadening and narrowing at the water-line as she hissed through the silent seas. Her yards were trimmed dead square, cordage taut, decks crowded with people, all peering out at this sailing-ship lying becalmed and sweltering in the doldrums.

"She's a picture," they whispered; "don't talk." <sup>6</sup>

How silent she was, how statuesque and reminiscent of dreamland! How she blended into the seascape, how perfect were the curves, the tapering spars piercing the blue, the soft bloom of the canvas, the delicate tracery of rigging creeping away, hiding behind sails, reappearing, vanishing in air! Man could not be there. She lay too still, too peaceful, to harbour man. A picture set in that deep translucent blue that only Somerscales seems able to reproduce. A picture in silver-point, delicate, fascinating, and now hoisting a little string of flags—flags which hung idly in the stillness and would not show their shape, dabs of colour pointing to the inevitable, and saying in the terse dialect of the sea, "B.N.D."—"Close: I wish to communicate."

"I"—Men, therefore, were in this picture. Incongruous!

Then from the high bridge of the liner there fluttered the red-white-red-white-red pennant: the answer, laconic, cold, uninspiring, "Yes."

And again a new set of flags climbed amidst the soft round shapes on the sailing-ship—"J.C.N."—"I will send a boat." Nothing more. The men who said it might be speaking in Greek or Russian, French, or any language, but to the liner there was but one meaning. "I will send a boat," and presently the why became apparent.

"D.P.G.M." came out to be stared at—"Can you spare me provisions?" And the liner made haste to answer with the red-white-red-white-red pennant, the cold, laconic, unimpassioned "Yes" of the northerner.

That was what appeared. But far down amidst the whirring cranks and blazing furnaces men called to each other, giving orders in crisp dialect at this hindrance to the legitimate haste of a mailship, and the liner answering to it, bounded less rapidly, thrilled less noticeably, brushed a smaller foam-stretch before her, and ceased altogether to pour that foul smoke upon the seascape. As an engine shuts off steam on approaching a station, so the great ship closed her draughts and ceased to pour coal on the furnaces.

For across the blue expanse, fluttering out like a frightened gull from behind the silent ship, crept a small white boat, the boat of which invisible men had spoken: oars waving, backs bending, and in the stern-sheets a man and a child. Norris with his MS. and Jacky alert, brimful of question.

The mailboat lay at rest scarcely a ship's length distant—black, reeking with energy; tall, a mammoth of the seas. The swell ran by her with little gurgling cries, licking at the iron plates, slobbering over the streak, as it runs up the side of a wall at the edge of the sea. The liner scarcely moved. She paused unflustered, haughtily breathing through distended nostrils, until a ladder came swinging down, then the valves closed.

The boat described a circle heading towards it. A voice cried out, "In bow!" An oar crashed on the thwarts. "Way enough! . . . unrow!" A rope was thrown, the boat crept to the ladder, and Norris, with Jacky climbing beside him, reached the deck, melted away in the labyrinthine passages, and was lost in handshakes, talk, laughter. For people when they fall across each other in the world's lone spaces meet with a delight and spontaneity quite unknown to the stiff dwellers in a city.

"How are you? Jolly glad to see you—got any beef to spare?"

"Beef? Piff! Send for the steward there, Mr Brown, and you, sir, come into my cabin." That is the method. And you enter the cabin to the popping of corks.

So it happened at this meeting of the giant and the fairy in that part of the seas we term the doldrums. The giant had beef and mutton and vegetables to dispose of; and the people had oranges and cakes and sweeties for the child fairy who had visited them, and for the fairies waving there on the decks of the picture. They had also kodaks and other instruments of torture known to snapshotters, and they took pictures of the picture and pictures of the fairies, and behaved as people behave always when a small child-face comes upon them from seemingly inaccessible and astonishing places.

So fifteen minutes passed—then the package in the hands of the purser and a "fresh feed" in the bows of the boat, Norris and Jacky descended and passed once more across the narrow strip of water and reached "home."

The *Coorong* looked still and placid as when they had left her; solitary, too, when an hour later the last blob of smoke had melted into the gathering clouds on the far horizon.

Silently the day waned, and motionless, dream-like, the old *Coorong* melted into the swift rush of tropical night. Her lights crept out. On the forecastle a dim figure marched; on the poop an officer. Her bell, sounding the lapse of time, echoed at intervals. Her sails slatted high in the breathless vault. No wind, no sea, no movement—only the little rills of light thrust out on the mirror, the shadows of the sails, the tracery of rigging. And amidst them, rising swift from the profound and silent depths, the tragedy of life, the gleam of chaser and chased flashing momentarily through the darkness.

And aft, beneath the sheltering awning, Norris dreaming and in the throes of a man remembering blemishes in that work he had dispatched to shadow-land.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE COORONG BEGINS TO MOVE.

"Mr Cals'on!" cried a small maiden as she halted at the edge of the chart-room, "Mr Cals'on!"

"Hello, Claire!" came the answer from a man in the rigging—high up near the mizzen-top.

"Oh! whatever are you up there for? Please come down, I want to speak to you 'ticularlally."

"Business?" questioned the man.

"'Portant," nodded the girl. "Do come."

The man pocketed his binoculars and descended. He took the child beneath her arms, and, lifting her, kissed the sunburnt face—"I shan't be able to do that in ten years' time," he said with a laugh.

The child rubbed her cheek. "Why not?" she questioned.

"Because you will be a young lady then and would object."

"I shan't," said the child. "I like being kissed, 'cept when they prickle."

Mr Calston seemed impressed by this view of the situation. He eyed the small maiden and critically felt his beard. As chief officer of the *Coorong* and a friend of the dainty vision beside the rigging, he allowed himself some latitude. "Ah," he remarked, "then I shall have to shave when the time comes, eh, Claire?"

Claire, round-eyed and uncertain, "S'posed so," then added as an afterthought, "but even shaved people prickle when they kiss. Couldn't you 'vent it growing?"

"Perhaps I could."

"With a witch or a fairy or something—like they used, you know?"

Again the mate passed his fingers through that grizzled beard and ruminated. He had no imagination. The only world he knew was prosaic—filled with the struggle for promotion.

"I don't know," he said; "I guess you'll have to cut off his head—if he has hair anything like most men . . ."

"I said you," Miss Claire asserted, pinning him down.

"Oh, me. Well, I could try, if you wanted me to—very much, you know."

"Of course I should want," said Miss Claire; "beards are horrid."

"So they are," Calston agreed; "but we take to them like ducks take to water, and, after a time, the girls take to them too. You see," he floundered a bit here, trying in an elephantine manner to enter into her view of the thing,— "you see we can't do much with fairies, or witches either, in these days, . . ." he floundered more, "because, you see, we're grown out of all that, and . . ."

"Oh! but mummie says we could."

"What—get rid of our beards?"

"No, silly, but ovver things can be done, arms and noses can be done, so why not beards?"

Mr Calston stared at the deck, seeking inspiration of the planks. He moved aft and stared into the binnacle, but the compass card suggested nothing. Claire kept him company, clinging to his pocketed hand, and heard him administer stern advice to the helmsman on the necessity of keeping a good course without a quiver, then came back with him and stood again near the mizzen rigging. Here he looked at Claire and said, "If mummie says it can be done—why, it can. That's certain."

"Of course," said Claire, "so you'll do it, won't you?"

"I'll read it up," the mate hedged, "for, between ourselves, little woman, I've rather got out of hand with the fairy folk and so forth. I'm getting old, you see, and, as the fairies don't bother much about old . . ." he halted suddenly on the verge of debatable ground and changed the subject with the air of a philosopher out of his depths. "Oh, by the way, you called me down—we're forgetting, aren't we, . . . you said 'business,' you know."

Claire jumped to an attitude, heels together, hand lifted to salute—"I fordot," she said. "Please, Mr Cal-s'on, dad says, will you 'sweat up'<sup>1</sup> the gall'n an' tau-s'l

<sup>1</sup> Tighten.

an' royal halliards an' see everything all clear at eight bells."

Dad was Captain Arthur Norris, commander of the *Coorong*, who bent over a chart spread on the cabin table pricking off the afternoon sights.

Calston moved a trifle stiffly to the salute and answered without a smile, "Aye, aye, sir." He began to walk towards the break of the poop, and in a second Claire was beside him, ceremony forgotten.

"Will they go wound the capsun, Mr Cals'on?" she questioned, "and do you fink they would sing 'wisky-johnny' just once more?"

"If you asked them, I am sure they would," said the mate.

"You," Claire begged, hugging his arm.

"I'll see, . . . perhaps . . ."

"Do—oh do! And Jacky wants to sit in the middle, like he did when we came from Melbourne. I know he does—he may, mayn't he?"

"Of course he may. And where will you go?" the mate questioned with a fine air of acquiescence.

"I'll stay wiv you and say—belay! May I?"

The chief laughed aloud. Claire had the whip-hand of him and, woman like, was prepared to make full use of the privilege. "Yes," he said between the chuckles, "I giye you leave to boss the whole show and to do as you like, this once—for in a week we shall be at home and you . . ." he paused, glanced at the small face lifted to his, and turned to shout—"Forward there! Lay aft the watch!" in the voice of a lion.

Claire did not quail. She stood expectant beside him. Jacky, a small boy in full sailor rig, scrambled from behind a spar on the main deck where he had been sailing boats in the lee scuppers, and presented himself all wet at the head of the ladder——

"What's we goin' to do, Mr Cals'on?" he questioned eagerly.

"Sweat up, sonny."

"Capsun?"

"Yes."

"May I get in the miggul?"

"Yes."

The watch came running aft, and the chief leaning over the rail said, "Main top-s'l halliards round the capstan there, and start a tune somebody," in a voice brimming with laughter.

At length the *Coorong* was on the verge of discoveries, entering the Channel and prepared to face October gales or November fogs in the process. For three days she had lain watching the same blue strip of sea, marking the gathering clouds, noting the kelp and Sargasso weed floating and alive with crustacea in her path; then had come a swift rush of wind heralded by the flood of all tropical storms, and she had gone staggering up the pathway of the vanished liner, foaming at the bends and humming like a top new set a-spinning.

So she had reached the trades; had endured three weeks of buffeting, caught the tail end of a gale and whisked into somnolence at the edge of the banks. Now a new lease of life had come to her and she pushed onward, resolute to attain the end. Last night a light air had crept up from the sou'-west and set the ripples singing under the forefoot. It had grown steadily until noon, and now promised to run them into port without further dallying. The crew recognised the value of sweating up, therefore, as they recognised the use of any work that would push them within hail of a tug-boat, and prepared smartly for the ordeal. Jacky, moving in triumph beside the brass-topped capstan, was instantly lifted and seated thereon. The rope was placed, bars skipped, and the march commenced.

"What'll we sing, sonny?" asked the shanty-man.

"Wisky-johnny," announced the small autocrat without hesitation.

"Wisky-johnny ain't a capstan song," the man protested.

"Never mind," cried the bo'sun, "give it lip!"

"That's what's the matter," said Jacky, relapsing into the vernacular, "give it lip!"

And they gave it lip, grinning and shouting alternate lines in chorus as they st

"Oh, whisky's here and whisky's there—  
Whisky! Johnny!  
Oh, whisky's here an' everywhere—  
Whisky for my Johnny."

Oh, whisky made me pawn my clothes—  
Whisky! Johnny!  
Oh, whisky gave me a spotted nose—  
Whisky for my Johnny."

Jacky on the capstan-head revolved slowly, beating time with the mast of his boat, vigorously alert for sequence. "Dad!" he shouted, as the shanty-man drew breath, "poor ole dad, Meekings!"

The man resumed with a portentous wink—

"Oh, whisky killed my poor ole dad—  
Whisky! Johnny!  
An' whisky drove my mother mad—  
Whisky for my Johnny."

"Fight!" cried the small boy, his eyes ablaze, "fight, Meekings."

"Oh, whisky made me start an' fight—  
Whisky! Johnny!  
An' whisky sent me 'ome dead tight—  
Whisky for my Joh . . ."

A shrill whistle broke upon the rasping song, and a small voice on the break of the poop cried out, "Pall the capsun, . . . belay tau-s'l halliards!"

The men obeyed with grave faces. There was a fair wind. They were going home—nearly there, in point of fact—and very willing to take life jauntily. Some one reiterated the orders as they swung off and made fast the rope. "Belay it is, sir. Aaall fast!"

"Did I do that right, Mr Calston?" said the small voice on the break of the poop, "quite like a man?"

"Quite," said the chief.

"Just like you says it?"

"I don't think," said Calston, with a severely critical intonation, "that you could better it if you tried for a month."



There was a long-drawn sigh, a little catch in the breath, and a slight clenching of hands as Miss Claire accepted her meed of praise.

"When I'm grown up," she announced, "I shall make dad have me for mate. It will be 'lightful."

"It will," said Mr Calston, but without a smile.

They proceeded by stages to tighten up all the sails and to haul on various sheets and braces; they moved from rope to rope, from mast to mast, pulling at the ponderous yards swaying in the new-found breeze, and singing weird songs with the happiest demeanour; they accepted for gospel each inspiration of the youthful Jacky, and responded briskly to the thin child-voice, giving orders at the chief's side—nothing came amiss: jangling was unheard, even the ship's lawyer, a man with a long jowl and close-set eyes, who chewed incessantly, found himself in harmony with operations and forebore growling. There was a fair wind. After weeks of dallying they were on the edge of Soundings, with a fresh breeze booming from the caves of the South.

They moved towards home through a haze that grew with their progress.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A PAIR OF PINK SHRIMPS.

There was a fire in the *Coorong's* small saloon, and before it were grouped those whose privilege it is, at sea, to stand or sit and listen to the wind without the necessity of attending its whims.

Down the funnel it made music: without the closed doors it sang with growing strength, in gusts, in dabs of sudden energy, as though it would point out to those who ruled the puny dot palpitating beneath it, the power it held to blot them from the face of the waters. The dot skimmed serenely onward, her sails pulsing with the breath that filled them.

In front of the fire was spread a rug; on the rug stood a bath filled with steaming water; beside the bath the two children, clad in combination pyjama suits, and looking like a pair of pink shrimps audaciously alive despite their boiling.

Captain Norris leaned against the table smoking, and watching the children's frolic. Jacky with his boat set at the side of the bath strove to direct its course to the farther shore; Claire bent over with puffed cheeks to supply the motive power.

"She wants more hellum," said the boy; "she goes too much to the s'uthard, doesn't she, dad?"

"The wind isn't steady, Jacky," said his father, "and her sails are too flat—ease them off a bit."

Jacky performed this operation by lifting the boat from the water, and twisting the gaffs and booms a trifle. Then he set it back, and the two leaned over puffing alternately. Considered from a navigator's point of view the trip was not a success: it verged indeed on madness, and the children recognised their failure.

"Bovver," said Jacky, "she won't sail straight."

"Lets have a wreck," said Claire.

"Lets!" Jacky echoed.

"Like we nearly had in Backstairs Passage," Claire emphasised, round-eyed and eager.

"Oh, yes—lets. But there's no rocks."

"The sides is rocks," Claire decided undismayed; "one of your hands is rocks, and the uvver is captain. Everywhere there's rocks all round, and she's in a cliticle situation—but you are the captain, an' you must save her."

"You stir up on your side, I'll stir up on this," said Jacky, eager for fighting. "Now, then, make a 'mendous sea to begin wiv."

They stirred resolutely until Jacky declared the sea was mountains, then bent over to fight out the issue.

"You blow all the time," said the boy, "it's got to be a hullicane. I'll help."

They blew from opposite quarters until they were breathless and choking. They flopped with sponge and flannel, making "a sea" that threatened to swamp their frail toy:

the boat end and appeared in every attitude simultaneously, but it did not sink. It lay over, and at critical junctures was rescued by the hand which did duty for captain.

Claire was breathless, Jacky triumphant. The boy rose from his knees carrying the boat.

"I saved her," he cried out. "She was drefful near being lost in that last squall, but I saved her because I put her hellum down and brought her round—didn't I, dad?"

The captain laughed aloud. The facile manner in which this pair lisped technicalities of the sea amused and sometimes alarmed him. But at this moment he was buoyant, smoking a pipe, with a fair wind buzzing in the taut wire rigging, so he laughed. "Yes—you saved her, my boy—you saved her," he said; "but you are wet with the ordeal, and must get a change. You too, Claire. Here! let me rub you down. . . . Cha! cha! 'Pon my word a pair of pickles—Steward!" He went to the door and called down the alleyway, "Steward! bring some dry sleeping gear for the children."

The wind raised its voice in the narrow passage and roved booming round the cabin. The lights flickered, and Captain Norris closed the door hastily. "Gad!" he said, "I think we are in for a breeze at last."

"A big breeze—like we had off the Cape, dad?" Claire questioned edging to him.

"Well, no—perhaps not so big as that, little one—why?"

"Oh, because," said Claire. And apparently the answer sufficed. Norris took the child on his lap and fondled her hair.

"I like a breeze to be big—the biggest it can be," Jacky announced at this, and edged to the other, the disengaged hand.

"Of course you do," said his father; "but then you are a boy, you know."

"An' doesn't wear frocks," said Claire.

"Frocks!" Jacky echoed in supreme disdain; "I never fink I didn't indeed."

The steward appeared with dry garments, and the two danced off to mother's room to effect a change. From within the closed door came a laughing chorus: the shouts of a pair of pink shrimps engaged in battle with costume and mother.

Captain Norris seated himself beside the fire and pointing to the implements of warfare on the rug, said, "We've had a wreck, steward, but it's all over now, and you may clear it."

He did not smile as he spoke. The smile died with the exit of the children. He sat puffing quietly at his pipe.

"Has it gone eight bells yet?" he questioned, after a pause.

"No, sir—not yet."

"When Mr Calston comes off watch, tell him I wish to see him."

"Very good, sir."

"And set glasses and grog in the rack."

"Yes, sir."

"After you have done that," said the captain, as he blew a ring of smoke, "you may turn in. I shall not want you again." A second ring passed through the first. Norris leaned forward watching it. The two sailed slowly towards the fire and disappeared in the heat.

This was not the man who had sat in a long deck-chair dreaming over the pitfalls of construction in that novel he had sent flying Londonward: he was changed. With the advent of a heavy breeze he was always changed. He became silent, thoughtful—taciturn almost to the point of rudeness. It was as though some subtle influence troubled him: an influence which he alone recognised, and born solely of the changed atmospherical conditions.

It is doubtful whether this phase was apparent either to the officers or to the crew. They saw simply a certain cast of feature, and knew that with its coming they must toe the line. With more boisterous natures it would have manifested itself in hard words, even to the point of blasphemy, and the crew would have decided offhand that "the old man had a gale of wind in his boots," or in other words, that he was scared. But no one perceived this in

Norris's case. Only the more highly-trained intelligence could perceive it—and then only by other issues than those plainly in sight. He was silent, perhaps even irritable: a curious vagueness oppressed him. He sat often as he sat now, gazing into vacancy, seeing with the eyes of imagination and listening to the voices with which his world was so entrancingly peopled.

The steward bent over his tasks, moved in and out the door, set glasses, stirred the fire, and departed. Eight bells rang with silver clarity high up where the wind and the watch made music. Then came silence, the quietening of voices within the cabin, and the hush which falls on the deck at eight o'clock—for at this hour the dog watches are closed for the day, and men turn to the more serious affairs of the shipboard world—duty and sleep.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A GLASS OF GROG WITH THE CAPTAIN.

Perhaps fifteen minutes later a knock fell upon the outer door, and the musing man looked up to cry, "Come in."

Mr Calston, red from the breezy deck and rough of hair, entered at once.

"The steward tells me you wish to see me, sir," he remarked.

"Yes—come in and close the door."

The chief obeyed.

"Sit down," said Norris.

Again the chief obeyed without comment.

"I wish to speak with you," the captain went on, his gaze still fixed on the fire. "I have wished to speak with you for some time on the subject; but somehow it has not come off, and, . . . er . . . deuced odd, isn't it? . . . What d'you think of the weather?"

The chief glanced at his commander. He had heard

## A Glass of Grog with the Captain. 19

this preface before, and wondered whether at length they were to arrive at the sequence; but he made no suggestion, and replied simply to the tag as he had replied before.

"Going to blow, sir," he said.

"Dirt?"

"Looks like it."

"Um-m-m!"

"The glass is falling; not much, though,—half a tenth since four o'clock," the chief explained. "But still, with a sou'-west gale and October *and* Channel—why, we may look for dirt, as I read it."

"True, true. It's a bother, though, Calston—eh, what?"

"Dirt's always a nuisance, sir, more or less—generally more in Channel," the chief admitted. "Still . . ."

"Just so. We can fight it as we have fought it before. By the way, how long have we sailed together now, Calston,—three years, five years—eh, what?"

"Four years and six months, sir."

"Hum-m! So long?"

"Just that, Captain Norris—no more."

Norris drew a box of cigars towards him and handed them to the mate. "Take one," he said, "if you can spare half an hour."

The chief complied. He lit a match, and, holding it steadily before him, drew breath, eyeing the fire and the red end of his cigar in turn.

"Second on deck?" queried the captain, watching the process.

"Yes, sir."

"You gave him my message—eh, Calston?"

"I told him," the chief replied, as he threw away his match and settled down to enjoy life,— "I told him to keep a clean look-out and to notify you at once of any change, or if he saw anything."

"That's all right," said the commander. "Flynn has made a careful officer after all—eh, Calston?"

"To tell the truth, sir, I've always regretted that Jackson left us. He was reliable as well as careful."

"Um-m-m."

The two men relapsed into silence—the chief, because no sailing-ship officer would dream of making conversation for a commander who obviously desired peace; the captain, because of the divergence of opinion on the qualifications of Mr Flynn, and because he was beating about the bush in that matter at which he so often hinted. They sat on, watching the flickering coal, listening to the song of the budding gale, wondering one at the other, and smoking like a pair of chimneys.

"Four and a half years, Calston," said the captain at length. "Yes—as you say, that is a long time to be chief of one ship."

Calston had not said so; but he let the thing pass. It seemed possible, judging by the ruminative manner in which the captain watched the fire, that he would get to the bottom of this difficulty without more ado. The ship was nearing home. On at least half a dozen occasions the mate had sat in that chair during the run from Melbourne, smoking a cigar and waiting to learn what it was his commander desired to say.

The first time, Calston told himself as he mentally reviewed the situation, this thing had happened was one night off South Cape. They were staggering along under a heavy pressure of canvas, and the seas were tumbling on board in tons. He had been sent for then, and he had come down to sit and smoke and wonder as he sat and smoked and wondered now; but nothing had been explained. There followed a night, about ten o'clock it was, when they were rounding the Horn, and a light had been sighted amidst the spume not far distant. Then he had been called from his bed, and he had sat and talked and smoked as they sat and talked and smoked just now. Again, off the Falklands, a gale was at their heels on that occasion, and one of the crew had been washed overboard. Again, off the Plate, when they caught the tail end of a pampero and lost some kites.<sup>1</sup> Again, off the Western Islands just lately, when they had stumbled over something in the dark, a whale perhaps, and had found no

## A Glass of Grog with the Captain. 21

alteration in the wells—each time there had been something unusual, something to bring men out to stare into the murk, each time a suggestion of peril, and with each escape had come that invitation—the short chat and smoke, a hint of something to be said, and silence.

The chief glanced up from beneath a sheltering hand, and discovered the commander intent upon the fire. From the inner room, Norris's state room, came the sound of a machine, the soft purr of running wheels, and the click of a needle-bar on the plate. Calston knew that Mrs Norris was busy within, working at the youngsters' frocks. The sound appeared to arouse the captain. He looked up suddenly, crying, "Eh, what?" in the tones of one awakened by a shock.

"I heard nothing, sir," said the mate, "except Mrs Norris's machine."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! then I must have been dozing, eh, Calston?"

"Possible, sir. There's a keen wind outside, and the fire makes one inclined to drowse."

"If you ever have command, and I do not see why you should not," said the captain, "take my advice and have no women on board. It adds to the . . . responsibilities, it adds to the dangers, it produces a sort of . . ."

"Tension?" queried the mate.

"Ah! you feel that, . . . you notice that?" cried the commander with a touch of his earlier manner. "Um-m! then it's not my fancy, . . . er . . . d'you know, Calston, I have a notion that somehow you and I run together pretty smoothly, and that it would be just as well, . . . perhaps, for instance . . ."

He was on the verge of it again when he halted, drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and used it violently, holding his nose trumpet fashion. A man with more imagination would have led him on, a man undrilled in the conventions of sailing-ship society would have joked and had it out of him by hook or by crook—but not so Calston. He sat calmly smoking his cigar, admiring the



firm, white end of it with the air of a connoisseur, and gently flicking the ashes into the grate. No wonder Claire had him in leading strings. No wonder Jacky found him an excellent playmate. The majority of women, having no other man to flirt with, would have seen how far he would bite at a proposal made leap-year fashion.

"Just as well," the captain resumed after a lengthy pause, "if I went on deck and allowed you to turn in, eh, what?"

He chuckled somewhat grimly for so young a man. There was no laughter in his eyes, no mirth—only a strained sense of waiting, of watching, of what one may, perhaps, term chaos, in that glance. His eyes had the habit of flickering when they faced other men's eyes, yet there was no suggestion of fear in them. The lines of his face, on occasion, had the knack of drawing the mark of interrogation broadly, and then, on discovery, retreating into stern attention. It was not the face of a strong man; kindness was there, laughter too, in full measure, imagination. The lips were over-sensitive, a trifle thick; not the lips of one gifted enduringly with force of character; but here a silky and blond moustache hid the tell-tale, and he stood out before all, except perhaps Mrs Norris, as a real good sort, a man who never yet had made a mistake.

A heavier sea than any encountered for many days set the vessel rolling as only sailing-ships can roll when running before the wind. A toy which had been left on the cabin table slid across and jingled on the deck to leeward. Calston rose, captured the trinket, and came back to his seat. The captain's eyes in the interval had run the gamut of question and answer. Now they rested.

"Um-m!" he said, "yes—I think you are right. We shall have more wind before we have less."

"Not a doubt of it," said Calston with phlegmatic unconcern.

"So long as it confines itself to blowing," Norris resumed, with the air of a man long decided on this point, "we can afford to laugh. It is what we want—but, if it comes in dirty, . . ." he paused expressively, and the mate took up his side of the parable.

## A Glass of Grog with the Captain. 23

"We'll have to chance it. We can but run for it—anyhow."

"True. We can always run."

"And to-morrow, or the next day, if the wind holds, we shall see Tuskar."

"True—um-m. Yes, and between ourselves, Calston, I shouldn't much mind if I never saw Tuskar again—or the *Coorong*—or anything floating, . . . steam or sail!"

For a second Norris had given rein to his thoughts with unusual vehemence. He withdrew his pipe and flourished it to mark the intervals—"anything afloat, . . . steam or sail," then becoming aware of the mate's interested gaze, drew back once more, replaced his pipe, and said half apologetically—"Have a glass of grog?"

The chief had been on the verge of offering his opinion as to the delights of enforced sailorising, but he got no farther than the initial word when Norris turned the subject. A glass of grog. Well, surely that was not to be sneezed at, and, on consideration, was not that how all these interviews had ended? Calston accepted. He sat in his chair and watched the commander mix two portions, cried "when" in response to the invitation and at the right interval; observed that his senior's hand was not as steady as once it had been, also that it poured a liberal dose after "when" had been called. He decided he did too much writing, and wondered stolidly what in the world there was to write about. But he made no objection to the rather long drink. An officer fresh from the deck and about to face three hours' sleep can scarcely be blamed for not quarrelling with a peg, solely on the ground of quantity.

● They took their glasses: raised them, glanced at each other over the rim, as who should say, "Here's to us," bowed slightly, and drank.

Five minutes later Mr Mate had betaken himself to his room and was preparing for bed. As he blew out the lamp and pulled the blankets about him, he heard the cabin door open and recognised that Captain Norris had gone to take his stand on deck till midnight with that man Flynn.

He wondered sleepily what on earth had induced the old chap<sup>1</sup> to get rid of Jackson and put that unheard-of "bla'guard" Flynn in his place; then passed by easy stages to wonder why on earth folk kept hinting at things and never spoke. What, he asked himself, is the use of having tongues if you are afraid to use them?

Afraid! The word opened vistas he was too sleepy to pursue.

## CHAPTER V.

### ANGEL'S VISIT.

"What ho, there, you sleepers! Tumble up! Shake a leg!"

Drowsy ears heard, drowsy faculties attuned themselves to obey; nerves awoke and thrilled response, they flashed the note to the brain centre, found it registered and sent back the message—"Right! All right." Sometimes with unnecessary emphasis anathematising the details of a sailor's existence.

Thereafter ensued the noise of men hurriedly dressing, donning oilskins, seaboots, sou'-wester, muffler; for the hum of the wind and the drone of seas roaring astern filled the iron houses as with the roll of a monstrous drum, and a watch newly sprung from sleep had no need to search for indications at the face of night.

"Tumble up, . . . tumble up! Lay aft the watch an' muster."

Five minutes had converted a flushed and sleeping crew into a group of shivering phrase-makers. Doors stood momentarily ajar—half-deck, forecastle, cabin—and the occupants emerged upon the wet, sending gleams of light across planks black as with oil. They gazed with eyes not yet inured to a darkness that met them, solid as a wall; they listened to the whip and curl of seas that

<sup>1</sup> Nautical for "captain."

moved, with faculties slowly becoming steel; they crawled aft to that rendezvous of theirs which had seen so many musters, and reaching the main-deck capstan, coined new swear words and damned the Lord of the seas in sulphurous sentences. Five minutes between the blankets and the wet deck, between warmth and stinging cold. It is an interval in the procession of events sufficiently wide to produce the whole gamut of passion.

The bo'sun called the roll, and eight unhappy men responded; boys followed, four in each watch, sons of professional men all, learning to be officers. Mr Mate on the poop, less placid of temper than when he sat beside the cabin stove taking his grog, asked of the black night when the devil they meant to relieve the wheel and lookout, and for answer, discovered a form approaching and saying truculently, "Hall present, sir," with the voice of one on the verge of mutiny.

"Right. Relieve the deck. Keep handy the watch. Who goes forward?"

"Sandies, sir."

"Good. Keep a bright lookout, my son, and don't be afraid to open your mouth."

The lookout guessed, *sotto voce*, he wasn't skeered to open his mouth, not he, and walked muttering through the growing chaos to the forecabin head.

Up there was a revelation in the laws of gravitation, centripetal and centrifugal forces; but the man, Sandies, knew nothing of either, and was happily content to marvel at the angles, the yawing, the madness of a track drawn in fire, and creeping snake-wise into the netherward shadows; was content to mark the eccentricities of a gait adopted by a vessel which, at eight o'clock, he had seen calmly lording it over seas that dwindled at her counter, to mark it and slap the capstan head to which he clung, and cry, "Go it, old lady, hit the luckiest!" in a voice that died in his beard. The thing appealed from no other standpoint, "hit the luckiest!" To Mr Calston already accustomed to the new environment, and commencing his four-hour promenade, the matter appealed perhaps still less. The wind he had prophesied was here the diffi-

had thought possible had already begun. He looked upon the facts with the eye of a philosopher to whom forces are presented only that he may harness them and keep them under control. He marched the poop, glanced occasionally into the small slit through which the helmsman eyed the swinging compass, said at intervals, "Watch her there, my lad!" or, "Don't let her yaw," in the tones of a man supremely confident and very alert, then marched as before, up and down, down and up, facing the grey drizzle which had leaped out of space to blur their progress.

A boy stole from his beat under the whanging cross-jack, and, lifting a corner of the skylight cover, stared at the clock. Hurrah! Half an hour gone. Only three and a half to wait, then bed once more. He moved across to the break of the poop and struck a single note—one bell.

The sound rolled down the decks, and came back in deeper tones from the fore-castle—one bell, half-past twelve; then, far off, and muffled by the roar, a voice announced the fact that Sandies had examined the lights and found them bright, and "All's well!"

Five minutes later the boy again moved aft. He crossed to where the chief stood on watch, and spoke to him under cover of one hand, "The Angel wants to see you, sir—hurricane house, lee side, sir."

"The Angel?" questioned Mr Mate, somewhat sternly, considering the suggestion.

"Beg pardon, sir—Mrs Norris," the lad apologised.

"Wants to see me, Harry? Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

The mate had assimilated the news by this, and had overlooked the inappropriate familiarity. "Go down to leeward, my boy," he ordered, "and tell the third mate to come aft and keep a lookout."

The boy moved away. The change was effected, and Mr Mate free to see the Angel.

Mrs Norris, at that perhaps twenty-five years, was that personage. She stood to receive him—a bright-faced, girlish woman, with the laugh of silver bells, and that

sobriquet speaking of guardianship which the men had found her. She looked her character as she stood within the hurricane-house door, clad in white, and wrapped in the soft and fleecy thing that had in some measure suggested the notion. "Angel?" She might have been angel anywhere, but here, amidst the boisterous jar of seas and clamorous wind, the chosen phrase stood as hers unchallenged. The face she lifted to glance at the mate showed purity, kindness, gentleness. She was good. She had compassion for the woes of sailor-men hazardously facing danger that others might sleep. Her smile, they said, was worth a month's pay, and to receive it a tribute to the gods that he who had it was of the blessed. No other woman had those eyes. No other woman had that gold-tinged hair throwing coppery shades in the coils. She was beautiful. The men loved her because of it. They swore it with appropriate violence.

She glanced up now with that bright smile of hers, and the chief stood raising his cap in the doorway. The grizzled warrior felt his pulses tingle. How she looked! God! how pure!

She said calmly, "What a night, Mr Calston! How I pity you all!"

Not you only, remember, but all. That was the secret of Mrs Norris's hold on mankind. Each one, in some indefinable way, belonged to her. And each one was prepared to die, "all ends up," as he expressed it, at the bidding of that fair lady, yet neither dreamed that he was favoured beyond his fellow. She was just their "Angel."

Calston replied, as all sailors would in such circumstances, that the weather was a trifle; but he feared she might take cold.

"Not a bit—not a bit. I am inured, you know. I seem to have lived all my life at sea. This is my fourth voyage, Mr Calston."

The matter seemed scarcely sufficient to bring so fragile a lady from her bed, or to take a chief officer from his post of observation to windward; but Calston knew, despite that density which so handicapped him in speech,

that Mrs Norris had not come there for nonsense, or to speak solely on the number of her voyages. He told her he was happy to remember that he also had sailed in the *Coorong* four voyages, then paused.

Mrs Norris looked up to smile, and said thrillingly, "Yes, and I think this will be my last—indeed, I hope it may be my last. Did you guess that, Mr Calston, or did Captain Norris tell you when he spoke with you to-night?"

No, the chief had not guessed it; nor, on consideration, had the captain said anything about it. Calston begged leave to say that he, for one, would be sorry if that were so. Then he drummed with his foot on the wet deck wondering whither they moved.

"But, supposing *you* had command, Mr Calston?" the angel flashed, watching him sidelong, while the wind made riot past the half-closed door.

"Me, Mrs Norris!"

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, there's Captain Norris and . . ."

"I don't think Captain Norris will stay in sail—if I do not care to continue," she suggested. "I don't think you need trouble about that, because, you see, we should probably wish to remain together—and . . ."

The chief, very earnest now, broke in at this with, "Do you mean that the cap'n is thinking of giving up the sea—of retiring altogether?"

"I think it possible. Has he made no remark to you on the subject?"

"Not a word," said the chief, thinking at length of those interviews which had always led nowhither.

"Would you like it?"

"What, the command? Jove! I wish I may have the luck. . . . Of course, if Cap'n Norris is going to throw it up."

"Of course."

"But I'm not senior chief, . . . and Hookers would want a man who could invest. I," said the chief deprecatingly, "have no money for investment." His fingers went up amidst the grey hair in his beard as though he pointed to them as evidence.

"That would not matter," the Angel smiled, "I—we have influence with Hooker & Sands. We own a share in the *Coorong*, and, if you will promise to help me, I will promise to help you—to command."

"I help you?" the chief blurted, amazed. "Mrs Norris! I'd give my soul to do it; but there's nothing one can do—nothing . . ."

"There is," said Angel, glancing, bright of face.

"Tell me," begged the man of grizzled hair, "give me a word, . . . a hint . . ."

"I want Captain Norris to give up sail."

The mate drew back a pace. "How could I urge that, especially now you've told me what you'll do. How can I?"

The smiles left Angel's face, and a look of quiet determination, half petulant, half pleading, reigned instead.

"But," she said, "I think it is necessary for my husband's sake."

The chief assimilated this as he had assimilated other bewilderments. He said very solemnly, "If it is for his sake as well, madam, why, of course, . . . but even then it's awkward—coming from me, the mate, you know."

"How long did you say you have sailed with my husband?" Mrs Norris asked swiftly.

"Four years and six months."

"And you have seen nothing—nothing?"

The mate shook his head. He had seen many things, but nothing plainly pertinent. "I don't understand," he decided, "quite how you mean."

"I noticed it first after that terrible night in Backstairs Passage, last voyage," she adventured, scarcely breathing.

"Since Backstairs Passage?" The mate saw nothing, guessed nothing, and was plainly like a man groping in the dark of a new blindness; and she, alert, pointing, on fire with suggestion.

"It's too fine," he blurted, "it passes me by. Fool, of course, . . . but I don't. Can't you help?"

But Angel shook her head, drawing back towards the mate. "No," she said, "I can scarcely do that. It may



be my fancy. I pray, seeing you have not noticed it, that it may be, . . . I pray it with all my heart."

John Calston heard the thrill in that sweet young voice and it brought the tremors leaping. He made bold to place one foot within the hurricane house, "At least you will give me a hint," he begged. "Believe me, I would do anything, . . . anything, . . ." he broke off, fumbling with words, and Mrs Norris took him up at once.

"You will? I know you will. You are honest—honest and brave. You have no fear."

The chief waited, his head bare.

"I don't like this—this gale. I am not afraid of what you may do—any of you, . . . and yet I am afraid. Do you understand?"

Plainly the chief did not, yet he vowed it was simple as child-play.

"If," she interrupted suddenly,—“if there should be occasion,” she paused at the word, pointing to it, and the gale boomed an accompaniment to her speech, “*at any time, mind,*” she shot out swiftly, “remember that Claire and Jacky are asleep in their cabin, . . . you promise?”

“Promise? God love you, Mrs Norris, there’s none wanted. Claire—Jacky? God love the pair, . . . and you, . . . and you!”

But Angel stood no longer in the companion-way; she was passing down the stairs, looking up cheerfully, brightly smiling, as though in that dark night her errand had been one of love—not prayer.

The mate returned to his post. The third found his. It was dark; the breeze a gale; in the cap of the wind lay rain, mist. Mr Calston stared into the void. Space had never before seemed so peopled with risk. He decided to take no hazards and came to the break of the poop and raised his voice. “For’ud there!” he cried.

“Sir.”

“Get out your horn and use it—three blasts!”

Minutes elapsed.

Then followed three small sounds—“Toot—toot—toot!”

The *Coorong* capered down a slope laughing in her sleeve. A sailing-ship signalling her advent! It was immense.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AT THE EDGE OF THE BANKS.

Rain, mist, and tumbling seas.

At the edge of the banks where the *Coorong* frolicked, the Channel was a blur of soft, curled rollers leaping hourly into prominence under the influence of the south-west gale. She moved in a scene of seething energy, wind-whipped, rain-lashed, desolate. It was as though the vast ocean, welling from profounder Atlantic depths, discovered in the knolls and shoals, those outposts of our grey-clad islands, a reason for anger, and strove to annihilate them. The water spewed muddily amidst the shallows, baring teeth no longer white.

Somewhere, miles up wind, the Fastnet rolled a wan eye into the turmoil, calling to men of the dangers it surveyed; farther east, Tuskar, on the summit of a rock; south-east again, Ushant, all energetically shouting—"Beware! here lie the rocks, . . . here, too, lie the skeletons of those who have sunk in the race against time—beware!"

But there are other dangers than those found on the verge of a rock-strewn coast, other methods of annihilation than those so hungrily proclaimed at the edge of the shallows. Rain, mist, and tumbling seas provide them.

Two ships faced each other in the blinding drizzle. 'Toot—toot—toot! I am running; I have the wind free!' laughed the one. "H-o-o-o-o! I am under steam!" said the other, but without a smile.

They raced down two sides of a triangle, drawing fast to the apex,—the one rolling up from the south under a lowering spread of canvas, and carrying a long counter wave hissing and tumbling to leeward; the other pulsing mechanically through the blackness, heedless of the rush and flurry of unclean seas, but watchful, intent, busy with a record, and bathed to the knighthoods in phosphorescence. Her engines drummed an accompaniment to the swish of seas that charged.

"H-o-o-o-o!" a prolonged blast automatically sounded at intervals of one minute—the steamship's warning. "Toot—toot—toot!" brayed on a tin-trumpet bought of Germany by a "Dutchman" facing oblivion—the sailing-ship's cry for room.

Those were the sounds thrown upon the night, and the night took them in her bosom, hugging them lest a whisper should escape.

Rain, mist, and tumbling seas.

A squall came booming from the black throat of the gale, and a man standing straddle-legged on the sailing-ship's deck cried out sharply, "Stand by your royal and t'gallant halliards! Lively's the word!" Then again as he moved across to the helmsman facing the gleaming binnacle, "Let her go off a bit—steady now! . . . Don't rush her!"

The man was Captain Norris, the ship the *Coorong*.

A sailor, smothered to the eyes in oilskin coat and sou'wester, span the wheel deftly this way, that, and made gruff answer, "Aye, aye, sir!" in the voice of one who knows he is nearing home and is prepared to handle the money he has earned. "Steady it is!" The light from the binnacle falling upon him in patches, discovered him earnest and watchful. He doubted nothing.

The ship swept off before the wind, and her headsails clanged on the stays. "Steady! . . . No farther . . . let her go at that!" said the voice again as the lithe man crept back once more to the rigging.

The squall hoozed. Rain hissed upon the leaping seas, drove slantwise across decks that swayed, stinging the faces of men who watched, blurring their vision. The lights were dimmed. The wind made music far aloft among sails that hummed with the note of muffled drums—b-o-o-o-m-m-m-m! s-h-h-h-w-i-i-r-r! b-o-o-o-m-m-m-m! "Let her slide!" said the crew with the voice of faith; "let her hum!"

That is how the *Coorong*, laden with wool and hides for a shivering British nation, drove over the seas on her final run for home, and her crew revelled in the knowledge that again they were moving; that in two days, three at most,

they would be paid off, free men—free to woo the girls they so persistently remembered. For ninety odd days this ship had obeyed the will of him who stood now on the poop to watch and give orders. She had carried them through the turbulent regions between South Cape and the Horn scatheless and without snapping a yarn; she had sauntered up the South Atlantic hands on hip, proud of her capacity to escape; she had dallied with the doldrums, bathed in the rains, frizzled in the sunshine, laughed at the squalls, and finally caught trades which rushed her west—west, as though she were a “greyhound” nosing for New York. Now she walked the seas like a racer, splashed to the girths, and her crew beat numbed fingers as they marked her progress down the home stretch.

Blind of eye, and in a curtain of rain, they were approaching England,—the home of some of them, the desired, the fought-for, the loved,—and her people were intent on to-morrow and Tuskar.

Out there, in the blank mask they approached, lights would presently glow—lights that should lead them home. Out there, where the blackness was most impenetrable, were the white cliffs, the grey granite rocks, the bell buoys, the lightships, the green fields off which tugs prowled waiting for such as they. They saw their journey accomplished, the hawser on board, sails coming down no longer required; they saw the boarding-house masters, and forgot their extortions; they tasted the rum, and forgot the headaches; they twirled in the dance, and forgot the stupidity, the robbery to which they journeyed; they decided, as one man, that the girls had hold of the rope this time, that they would haul them in and then crowd round for kisses.

They revelled in the notion.

Standing knee-deep in brine that gurgled across and across the deck with each recurring roll, they rubbed hands over recollections of the softness of those lips, of the brightness of those eyes, of the honeyed trip of those tongues they knew, and peering out at the still figure leaning solitary near the rigging, cried in their beards, “Let her go, skip! Blow stand by, . . . let her have it!”

The squall drummed a monotone deep in the bass until word came down to clew up the main royal and make it fast. Then, for a space, a sing-song voice cried regretfully in a minor key to the accompaniment of whanging canvas far aloft.

The song died. Two figures crept up amidst the shadows, and the whanging ceased.

Two bells.

The sound rolled over seas deserted as were the waters upon which Noah sent forth his dove. A track of fiery beads sizzling astern alone proclaimed their comet-like march through space; the thunder of seas the fact that seas were there. For months they had lived thus, obeying orders, reliant on the will of him standing there straddle-legged and silent against the murk. For months they had moved thus, living in the faith that somewhere at the end of things England existed to bid them welcome. From the Horn they had come exultant: out of the regions of perpetual gale and snow; from the white cap of the world, through the brightness to the grey, and England, true to her habitat, lay before them clothed in rain,—they doubted nothing.

Two bells. Five A.M. and the galley-fire advertising the fact that somewhere in the blackness a cook prepared coffee. Five o'clock! The hour when the mate of the half-manned tramp in the still, dark dawn waits for the magic bell which shall herald the looked-for coffee, and realises that for minutes past he has dozed comfortably behind the dodger; when the man at the wheel, grimy and grotesque of aspect, begins to spin the spokes more deftly, and the lookout creeps back to the perch he has deserted. The inert time. The close time for all living things—the hour of the tired *Crathie's* blunder and the dissolution of a German liner. Yet here, a crew, on the alert gazed into the void and dreamed of the girls and England.

Five o'clock, and with it the first note of that ponderous horn booming somewhere in the murk; the knowledge that at length they were coming in touch with the world they had left last year, that they scudded alone no

longer, but that in the distance, upwind, something owning a voice of steam and the ability to shout approached.

Men craned their necks, staring through sheltering hands. They saw only the clean arch of the bellying foresail and one dim figure bunched beside the capstan. A voice from the break of the poop went up to swell the muffled roll of drums: "Keep your eyes skinned there for'ud, and sound your trumpet!"

Flynn, the second mate, passed from his post beside the captain, and crossing amidst the main-deck wash, climbed the forecastle ladder. Two figures now showed under the foresail, one stooping, the other pointing with his horn at the blackness. "Toot—toot—toot!" said the Dutchman, "toot—toot—toot!"

The men grouped together on the main-deck heard, and nudged each other. "I'd be sorry fer anythin' as happened t' lie acrost our track to-night—eh, sons?" said one. He patted the rail in jubilant pride. "Go it, old lady!" he emphasised; "hit the luckiest."

A philosopher, grey-beard, clad in shiny oilskins and corded round the waist and ankles like a navvy, glanced at the sizzling counterwave and said, "Better hit than be hit these times. Let her go, skip, . . . let her hum."

And the wet sails, high aloft, as though in answer to his invocation, drummed out the song of a gale.

A rosy-cheeked lad, one of the Conway boys perfecting his acquaintance with the sea, climbed from the poop and halted beside a group of sailors,—“Cap'n says, another hand on the lookout, and tell Mr Flynn he wants him aft. Keep handy the watch, and stand by to pass the word.”

The men grinned.

“Keep handy it is, sonny. Sleep? Who wants sleep to-night? we're goin' home,” said one.

“If I had a gell as would pull like your gell's pullin',” said another, “d'ye think I'd leave her?”

No one answered. The man moved away to obey the order,—“I'd see her dotty well dead first,” he

announced to the spirting deck-wave; "blowed if I wouldn't."

The boy had no great interest in the subject; he was wishing for eight-bells and his bunk, as only youth can. He went back to shiver with his chum under the lee of the crossjack, and presently the mate returned to his post near the wheel.

"Toot—toot—toot!" said the little tin-throated sheep under the foresail, "all's well with the world, all's well."

"H-o-o-o-o!" roared the approaching lion, hidden in the downpour, "have a care—a care!"

Again a squall broke from the throatless void and pushed screaming over the ship. The drizzle leaped to a torrent, and the reef-points, beating amidst the drums, tapped with the patter of shot. On the lookout two men stared into the mists. "See anysings, . . . hear anysings, now?" said the Dutchman.

"Devil the see. Keep that harn goin'!"

"Horn pe tammed—who gan hear mit this, . . . loog-out! or you vill be vash away, you."

Thus the twin watchers beneath the bellying foresail as the ship buried her nose at the base of an avalanche, stern in air, critically tip-tilted.

"Holdt dight, you! Gott-for-tam! ve go too fast in this plack night, . . . some tay somesings vill . . ."

"Some day your sister! We're goin' home. Tune up the bugle—tune up."

"Dune up yourselves. It dakes me all my dime to holdt on, . . . ach! dune up yourselves."

"Toot—toot—toot!" said the horn in new hands, and out of the void came an answering boom.

"H-o-o-o-o-o!" louder, more insistent, pregnant of the force that gave it voice.

"See anything, . . . see anything, . . . anywhere?"

"Zee—I am plindt, me. Holdt on."

Again came the warning note resolutely booming.

The two men leaned forward staring, then the Englishman said—

"Hth! Got her. See that? Toot—toot—toot!" he reiterated, "got her anyhow." He raised his voice to

shout—"A light right ahead, sir, . . . close." And from different stations amidst the deck-wash various intonations proclaimed the fact anew—

"Light right ahead, sir—closs!"

"Light raght ahead, sir—clooose!"

And from aft came the cry—"Light, . . . what kind of light?"

"Steamer, sir—showin' three lights, sir."

A nebulous haze wrapped them round; a glow-worm sheen softened the glare. The lithe man straddling the poop saw—"Right!" he cried, "very good!"

The crew relapsed into silence—they doubted nothing.

The two ships drew to the end of their journey: they moved down the sides of a triangle, the apex of which was smothered in spume, mist, rain. A gale roared in the ears of one, the roll of drums in the other. The one was intent on her record, the other running for home. The masthead light grew in intensity; a score of lights, blurred and very indefinite, spirted where just now had been luminosity. The voice of the steam-whistle became pointedly violent. It boomed over seas holding their breath to hear, and out of the blackness, evolving slowly, came a grim, black shape dotted with eyes—the loom of a giant of the seas.

A sudden tremor took the watchers. Voices leaped with spasmodic insistence. "What's it goin' to be, . . . what are we goin' to do? God! she's into us! . . . The hell, you say? . . . Hard up, sir, . . . hard up!"

Then again, as in contemptuous refrain, "Hard up be damned! She's a steamer. She does the hard-upping—you bet."

Ensued a pause, then—

"Sons! what's it to be? . . . I say she's into . . ."

A sounding clang on the headstays give an inkling.

"Right, oh! The old man's takin' the curl out of her. Off she goes—see that?"

A sou'-wester and gleaming oilskin clinging in the waist gave emphasis to his remarks.

"See that? Told you so. We's runnin', an' so we've got to port. All them as is runnin' hez to port. It's



the rule, . . . bet you the old man's not a fool—see that?"

That was the swift displacement of lights from starboard to port as the *Coorong* swept off before the wind.

"How's that for high—eh?" he reiterated.

The sou'-wester stretched out a nebulous arm, pointing, disdainful of any criticism that should impugn the still form standing straddle-legged on the poop. He had brought them from Melbourne. His actions had been laughed at, his methods condemned; but now they were nearing home, and carping was done with. They doubted nothing.

How high it was, or how low, received but scant tribute. Some one growled, "Cheese it, you an' yer . . ." Another, "Here goes to call the chief, anyway;" then paused, as a sudden change of note fell upon the night—two short blasts from the steamship's horn.

Silence stood beside them. Men stared, shading eyes rounding with fear. Someone said, "W'y, he's starbudin'!" in an insane whisper, then relapsed into blasphemy before the swinging move of lights, the change of red for green, and the knowledge that at length the steamer had seen.

Something buzzed amidst the clamour of slatting sails and whanging blocks—the note of rolling machinery. A burr as of a swarm of bees darting madly for a new home. A hum, a drone, that smothered the noise of drums tattooing darkly high aloft; and into it broke the cries of startled men—

"Sir, she's starbudin'! . . . she's . . ."

"She's into us, . . . safe. . . . What in Gawd's name are we after? Hi, mates! All hands! All hands!"

And from aft—

"Steady helm. Steady—starboard!"

Voices rose to a wail, died away, rose again. The slatting head-sails clamoured aloud, and into the turmoil came the swift rush of iron cleaving water, tossing it aside, disdainful of touch—S-s-s-s-w-w-w-i-r-r-r! The note of a thousand looms.

A knife-like stem rose high above them. At its base rolled the bow wave, spiriting thinly on either side, scin-

tillating, full of phosphorescence. It moved precisely, without a quiver, pointing to strike.

The *Coorong* quailed beneath it. She gathered herself together to spring out, her sails roaring—then reeled, tripped up, and fell apart.

For a moment there appeared, amidst the thunder of wreckage, a lithe man standing on the rail, high on the poop, shaking his fist impotently at the black seascape.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE *SENTINEL* ON DUTY.

“Collision stations! Tumble up! Bear a hand!”

The R.M.S. *Sentinel* halted, pawing the waves and breathing stertorously through opened nostrils. She lay passively obedient to the will of her lord—a stern-faced man, hooded and cloaked, on the bridge. Sixty feet below, the water leaped in fussy babble, dashing impotently on that mass of iron and vibrant steel,—the man heeded nothing of its clamour, he was intent on a series of orders.

“Collision stations! Close all bulkhead doors! Boats’ crews ready there! Life-buoys—lines—stand by to lower away!”

“Mr Everitt! pass the word to the electrician and get the lights on. . . . Stop her there!”

The orders fell crisply as though collision were the one thing in which this man was practised; the crew ran methodically hitherward, thitherward, unfussed, unalarmed, obeying the shrill “calls” as though in all their lives they had moved to no other duty. Discipline, order, method—that was the system facing the danger; and above all, silence. The passengers as yet slept unmindful.

Below deck, in the land of fire and steam and whirring cranks, engineers shouted orders; voices were raised above

the din of rolling machinery; men touched electric buttons, pulled levers, switched on circuits, spoke into tubes, all in obedience to the invisible spirit controlling events above. The light from opened furnaces fell upon torsos that were black and streaked with sweat; it fell upon men springing to new duties, battling with the imprisoned giant they controlled; but it saw no alarm, no dismay—everywhere was order, discipline.

A gong clanged brazenly on the starting-platform—tong, tong, tong, and instantly a grey-bearded engineer, clad in pyjamas and capless, touched a lever, and a crank pushed up its head in a bath of steam. Whir-r-r! it said, and sank out of sight. On the other side of a bulkhead a broad-set man pulled a lever the reverse way; a crank rolled down, rose again, disappeared, moving in clouds. The giant hull trembled anew; every beam took up the note, shouting it, trilling to it, until the gong said stop—then with a stroke all were silent. It was as if a spell had touched them, and they slept.

The mailship halted, pawing the waves and staring out upon them with eyes that threw long gleams far into space. Here and away little black spoons danced in the radiance, spoons that moved amidst the spume-like acorns in a mill-race. They were the *Sentinel's* children searching for life. Here and away a cry went up, sometimes an oath; but for the rest there was silence and strenuous fight.

Men were drowning. The boats were out to save them. The sea was marked with flares, past which the sprays drove murkily, like smoke across a kiln; they were attached to buoys, some of them holding a life. Wreckage lay in the path of the lights: spars, buckets that bobbed and strove to drown; hencoops with noisy broods straining their necks to see; bars, bales of wool, submerged and oscillating to the bottom; planks, toys—a Noah's ark with a red roof and painted windows; boxes, a fat sow floating like a bladder and screaming viciously at her habitat; dangling ropes, acres of canvas, like a mechanical sea on the stage, slopily pulsing in the wind, and again planks—planks—buckets, spars, all saturated, preparing for the plunge.

From the *Sentinel's* bridge, sixty feet poised in the murk, these things were visible like pin points, matches strewn on a bath. An officer, wet to the eyes, climbed the ladder and crossed to where his commander stood.

"There are a couple of them on board, sir. Seem to have climbed the bows when we hit. I think they are officers."

"Think?" the stern-faced man threw out.

"Well, sir," the other apologised, "I hadn't much time for talk, and they seemed a bit flustered."

"Hum! Take them to my room, and see they have every comfort."

Captain Callaghan turned on his heel, and, approaching the wing of the bridge, raised his glasses—"A bit flustered," he said, "good God!"

The spoon-like boats moved about in blinding rain, crawling, slow of gait. They strove tortuously up-wind, approaching an atom that bobbed, came to it, drew it in, and passed out of ken. Somewhere without the radiance they had heard a voice calling in despair,—perhaps the venture would end in succour, perhaps in death.

There were six boats down there throbbing to and fro in the blackness; six of the *Sentinel's* children, each fully manned. It was conceivable in such weather that some of them might never return; that to the tale of wreckage would be added the toll of rescue; that some one or other of those who so gallantly strove to lessen the disaster would answer no more when the roll was called. Only a commander knows fully the wrench of such a thought—one of his children!

Callaghan folded his glasses and moved slowly to the binnacle. "A touch ahead, both engines," he ordered, and instantly came the vibrant thud of propellers obeying his desire.

"So—stop! Quartermaster, go down and ask the chief officer whether any more have been picked up."

The man disappeared, and Callaghan moved again to the wing section.

Far away, low in the east, the rain-curtain showed tokens of thinning, as though a white-wash brush had

been drawn across the horizon to mark the spot which should have heralded day. In other latitudes the sun had long waked to search the waters he had left in the arms of night—waked to count the damage and hear the question of proportioned blame; but here only a tinge appeared—a tinge mistily white, sorrowfully thin, blending into the seascape. Consolation in embryo!

Callaghan stared into the dawn. He, too, had things to count, arguments to hear. Day would reveal to him precisely how he stood, how many had sunk at the impact, how many had gone down more slowly into the pit he faced; how many would survive to twist evidence at the courts.

That these things are to be reckoned with goes without saying. Expert evidence is an abstract quantity, hedged by lies, and raised upon a substratum of fact. Only a fool or an interested party gives credence to evidence of this kind *in esse*.

It would be said that he was going too fast; that no careful navigator would have proceeded at such speed in weather so obviously bad, for the wreck-charts have proved to men of lesser calibre than Callaghan that you cannot drive through space at twenty knots in these days without sometimes crossing a track. People would write to the papers accentuating their views and his foolhardiness. His own passengers, when they waked, would be of that tribe. But, he argued, sanely battling with events as they are, it was his business to drive; and if he avowed himself unable to drive, another would be found competent—besides, what did the fellow with such lights, such blurred anachronisms! And again, why did he alter his course? Was he not under sail?<sup>1</sup>

The pertinence of this query lay at the head and front of all questioning, and with it came the answer—logical, merciless, “If men play the fool, they must take the consequences.” The commander of a twelve-thousand ton

<sup>1</sup> The rule governing this states, “When one of two ships has to give way, the other must keep her course.” And again, “When two ships are meeting, one of which is a steamship, the steamship shall keep out of the way.”

liner has other matters to see to in these days of push and hurry than the possible delinquencies of men in sail. Still the query drummed for answer, the answer of him who, perhaps, lay drowned. He could not say.

A quartermaster arrived with a salute and a message from Walters. "Sir, chief officer says, with his compliments, none of the boats have got back yet; but he's found another of the crew jammed in the anchor stock, port side, sir."

"Hah—hurt?"

"Dead, sir. Cut pretty nigh in half."

"Hum-m! Very good. Keep handy."

The man passed to windward to regale his chum in the wheel-house with details of the find. The drone of their voices made its way on deck. But the commander heard nothing. He was assimilating the news.

"Good God!" he said again. Then paced swiftly up and down the leeward section examining his charge.

Out there the boats moved. Across them, sheltering them from the violence of the sea, the *Sentinel* lay like a street lighted for night. The busy waves scarcely touched her bulk. They struck blows far down beneath the belt; but the great ship remained as though they were not. Twelve thousand tons do not quiver when the flies buzz.

Dawn crept slowly up the sky—a white mistiness as though the sun wept for the sights he saw. It stole across the waters in lines, marking the swish and curl of seas that moved; picking them out in grey, toning the ship's gaunt side, painting her funnels grey, grey—grey as the wind coming up from the south, wet, charged with tears. It fell, too, on a promenade crowded by people staring out upon the greyness; people awakened not by clamour but by the sudden stillness which had fallen upon the racing screws. They watched the boats—those frail cockleshells that danced so gamely amidst the shadows—and commented on the carelessness which had caused so great a disaster. One or two fussy persons, more intent on the acquisition of dollars than prone to sympathy, expressed the opinion that they would be late

in New York, and anathematised the officers without stint. It mattered nothing. No one listened.

The boats crawled lamely homeward, each of them bearing evidences of her luck. Here came one bearing in her stern sheets an old man, over whom two of the crew bent pumping with his arms. The officer steering for the gangway shouted instructions alternately to the men who rowed and to the men who pumped. They drew alongside, and the doctor continued what had been commenced out there in the grey tumult. The man retched horribly.

Again a boat approached. She carried in her stern-sheets a woman and a man, and the promenade thrilled at the sound of a voice which had thrilled many hearts now still. Angel sat there, an angel no longer by reason of her wrap—for it was hard and stiff, the belly of the boat's sail gathered round her by one of her saviours. She remained passive until the gangway was reached; then the man, her companion, stood up and would have aided her farther, but she shook him off, saying swiftly, "I have no need of help. Go, for God's sake go and fetch them to me."

She climbed the ladder like one endowed with the strength of him who had saved her, and leaned panting against the rail. She was alone. A forlorn young figure clad in white, with a face rosy and water-splashed, hair gleaming, grace and roundness peeping shyly through the clinging draperies. She stood there in the glare of the electric lights, suddenly dazed by the massed forms crowding the deck. They were strangers. Nowhere apparently was there a friend; nowhere one on whom she might call for aid. The eyes stung her. They seemed to pierce her thin garments, to revel in her nakedness, to gloat over the curves, to laugh, to appraise,—the eyes of men half-hidden in wind-tossed beards, the eyes of boys astonished and grinning, the eyes of women, frightened, critical, suggestive of head-shakes. She stared, crouching beside the quartermaster bending over the boat's painter, until from the midst of the eyes a form detached itself and came forward. Then a voice cried out, "Stand back there!"

in an authoritative manner, and a man appeared before her holding the ulster he had doffed. He touched her shoulder. "Take this. You are cold. Take it and let me help you," he said.

In a moment she found herself clad in the warm, lined thing, her face buried cosily in a high, sable collar; her shoulders glowing thankfully amidst the folds. A flash of the eyes; a whispered "thank you," and the girl was among the wearers of furs and furbelows who, descending from the promenade, carried her with them to the ladies' quarters. They cooed over their find, kicking out trains and pirouetting like a colony of doves.

But the two men who had aided her stood gazing at the door through which she had vanished.

Her life she had at the hands of John Calston, chief of the lost *Coorong*, and him she dispatched into the spume with a nod and an order; her coat, the wrap that hid her, clung to her, nestling cosily at her breast, an antidote to the eyes, she had at the hands of Colonel Marchmont, late chief of the King's Own, and to him she vouchsafed a flash of the eyes and "thank you."

Marchmont lit a pipe and marched in silence to the promenade, memorising that glance. Calston, standing at the foot of the ladder, again looked quizzically at the officer commanding the boat, and said—

"Can you make room for a stranger?"

He made him welcome with chaffing unconcern, and as they pushed off to face the littered seas, Calston remarked as though in explanation—

"You see I've promised, . . . and although I know your fellows have them, . . . number two it was—she looks to me to bring them to her."

"To bring who to her?"

"Claire and Jacky."

"Are you her captain, sir?" questioned the officer, settling the steering-oar in its crutch.

"No—mate."

"Then where's the cap'n?"

"God knows. We haven't seen him."

"But she's his wife, I take it?"



"Yes, and yonder are her children." He stretched a vague hand in the direction of the foaming waters, then drew back, and sat huddled, shivering, but not from cold. "I'm a fool," he explained—"a fool, you know."

"Give way, my sons! Bend to it!" said the officer.

They bent to it, and their boat reeled in a bath of spray. She leaped from sea to sea, thumping with blows that shook her frame. The crew took no heed; they lay back on oars which bent like rapiers, grim of face, acknowledging the necessity that urged them.

Out there in the spume the fat sow laboured, squealing. On the slope of that roller was a hen-coop, floating and turning turtle on its uneven bed. A colony of hens clucked gamely at each revolution, floundering in feathers that stuck like glue. They pushed lean heads through the bars, cackling their fear, and gaping with open beaks; then came a buffet more rude than the last, and the house lay bottom up. The boat passed on. A man clung to a plank before them, twisting in aimless circles in the struggle for balance. He called aloud, a gurgling shout denoting his extremity; and the boat swerved from her course to reach him.

They came to him, clutched him, and drew him in. He lay on the bottom boards, swearing viciously they had torn his guernsey, drunk with fear. A misty roller reared head in the greyness, and swooped upon them as they turned; and a plank, carried on the flood, charged the boat's side. Crash! It struck them endways, ripping a hole through which the water poured in triumph. In that moment nature stood to win. A war of the gods! Man handicapped, the gods supreme; man obviously buffeted, beaten, falling into disorder, losing grip of the oars—and then into the hitch came the officer's voice, pointed with sarcasm, "Steady, sea-boys! What's the matter with your toothpicks?" and, "I thought I saw you wearing belts!" Then in sterner tones, "In bow and number five! Get your bailers to work! Pull port, . . . back starboard! Steady does it! So—starboard! Give way all!"

They were round. They sat firm on thwarts that

swayed beneath them. The buckets were at work, and the man crouching on the bottom boards growled furtively at the wetness of his seat. It mattered nothing. "When a chap hez breff to growl," said a voice, "you c'n reckon ~~he~~ ain't dead." Stroke emphasised the fact as he lay back on his oar, giving a satirical twist to the phrase that should have silenced an owl. The man passed it. He was wet. He considered this business altogether outside the hazards for which he stood to draw pay. He announced grimly he would have the law on any all-fired steamer as would cut a ship down as soon as wink—and in such weather! "What," he questioned, stiffly working his jaws and watching the steady flow of water,—~~2~~ "what was the use of a lookout if they couldn't dotty well keep their blinkers skinned?" He'd lost his duds—he would like thunderin' well to know who was goin' to pay for 'em—an' when?

No one answered. The oarsmen looked supremely wise, and the officer, sarcastic again, called out, bidding him take off his asinine cap and lend a hand with the baling—"Unless, maybe," he added pointedly, "you're hankering for breakfast with the fishes."

The man relapsed into silence. The water gurgled about his middle. He took off his cap and baled with the rest.

They thumped up wind like a tank in a tideway, and gained slowly on the ship, their haven. But while it was yet far off, a new order came to baffle them, "'Vast rowing!" it said. "Lay in your oars!" Then as the clatter ceased, "Overboard all hands, . . . get hold of the life-lines!"

The officer stayed to see this madness complete, and added to it by climbing over the stern. "Hang on, good!" he shouted, "she's safe as a church without us."

The boat rose and fell on seas which rolled across her now, the men bobbed like insane marionettes at each visitation. Cries went up to swell the bedlam, shouts of encouragement, laughter.

"You'll get yer face washed at last, my son," said one.

"A free tub," said another.

"An' get yer 'air combed wiv the planks," cried a third. "Stow it," a gruff voice suggested; "now then, Paltry, what price a song?" and two ragged baritones made music in spasmodic fashion as the seas leaped to blot them from remembrance.

Out of the din came an order thrown brazenly through a megaphone—"Hold on, men! hold on, . . . we'll have a line down in a minute to pluck you in."

They answered with a vainglorious shout—"Hurrah! hold on it is!" and from the starboard side, where the spume broke highest, there came a truculent voice asking, "What kind of all-fired safety-valve d'ye call this? Lumme! if my plank weren't a bed o' roses to't."

No one smiled. Few had breath to speak, for at that instant they were engaged in a duel with the boat which had developed a wish to turn turtle, and the officer was giving his views to those who leaned too heavily. "Paddle!" he cried, "tread water—or you'll finish it."

Silence fell upon the scene, and for some minutes there appeared that curious picture of a group of men in cork belts gravely bobbing beside the submerged boat, hands outspread, intent of aspect; then the truculent voice asserted itself, complaining vigorously of a new trial—"An' now," it said, "blowed if I 'aven't gone an' loss me cap!"

No one heeded. The sea had charge of it. It whirled somewhere where other trifles sank. The misty rollers played rounders with it, throwing it this way, tossing it that, making sport of the man's assertion finally flung broadcast—"It coss me a dollar on the Ratcliffe 'Ighway." The waters sizzled trying to drown it.

But a line was on the way to make a new diversion. A wall-sided lifeboat brought it noisily down, and the bow oar leaned over, passing it through the stern ringbolt, and making it fast to a thwart. The boats crashed together; one man, lacking a cork belt, found the strain excessive, and fell back amidst the spume unheeded. He cried out faintly, but the rest were cheering, some of them climbing into the stauncher craft, others being helped; he remained unnoticed and the boat passed on, towed by a rowdy winch till she came to the ship.

Captain Callaghan still paced the bridge, giving instructions; when they reached the side he came into the wing section, and remained to watch until the damaged boat was hooked to her davits and lifted clear. It seemed providential that either men or boat were there to be watched. In such a sea all might easily have been swallowed, yet he stood there thanking God for the aid He gave, unmindful of the fact that the gentlest, the bravest of all who went out had gone the way of others. John Calston was that man. "Honest," Angel called him once—and honest let him remain. Flynn warmed himself in the commander's room; Calston grew cold amidst seas that swirled.

A quartermaster arrived with the news, and Callaghan turned to meet him. The man saluted with precision and said, "Chief officer's compliments, sir, and the boat's crew is safe. They've brought one with them, another seems to be missing."

"Another. . . . Of which crew?"

"The *Coorong's*, sir."

With any other man it would be permissible to state that the commander appeared startled, but with Callaghan one can only say that his voice took a new intonation as he moved a trifle nearer and asked precisely, "Did you say the ship's name is *Coorong*?"

"Yes, sir. . . . Melbourne for Liverpool with wool."

Again the commander appeared to pass to a new depth of sternness. "You are sure?" he questioned. "How do you know?"

"Sure, sir. One of her officers told me, . . . him as we took in to your room, sir—an' . . ."

"That will do."

The man saluted, falling back.

"Go down," said the commander, "give my compliments to the chief officer, and say I shall be glad to see him as soon as he can leave—safely, you understand? Not before."

The man departed, and Callaghan fell to pacing the bridge once more. "Good God!" he said again. And the pacing became more rapid—almost restless indeed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A MEETING DOWN CHANNEL.

C

Two men sat in the commander's room awaiting his pleasure—Norris and Flynn, the captain and second mate of the dead *Coorong*.

The doctor had seen them and gone on deck to attend other cases; Callaghan's servant had found them dry clothes, helped to drag the wet boots from feet and legs long numb; had brought them slippers and whisky pegs, and made them comfortable; then, conceiving his duties accomplished, he, too, had left them and gone on deck to see what passed. It is not every day that a liner walks through a vessel and finds herself unscathed, for, luckily or unluckily, it depends on which craft you follow,—the angle of incidence is not often true. Thus the steward found it necessary to roam and compare marvels with other denizens of the "Glory hole."<sup>1</sup>

The captain and second mate were at leisure therefore to take whisky, lie down and go to sleep, or sit and wait. Flynn had taken copiously to whisky; Norris sat alternately eyeing him and staring at a picture of a man in uniform standing beside his elbow on the table, but generally he watched Flynn.

They sat thus in chairs because it pleased them, and they faced a difficult situation. They sat bunched with a shame which had newly dawned; tardily acknowledging they had been over-swift to leap, over-swift to save themselves at the expense of others—swift, perhaps, to damn themselves in the eyes of their fellow-craftsmen. The position was one to make any man not wholly sunk and degraded bite his lips and wish the thing might happen again. At any cost, at any hazard, then would neither leap—they swore it with eyes roving vaguely in search. But the thing was done. For good or evil they had given the word ordering the crew to save themselves, and they

<sup>1</sup> Steward's quarters.

alone, apparently, had answered. They sat awaiting the commander's pleasure, sipping his whisky and wondering, each of them, what lay in the other's thoughts; twisting, too, in their minds how they should best meet the questions which would arise, how they could explain the inexplicable.

The wind whistling through the mailship's steel cordage made a shrill accompaniment to the jingle of tumblers dancing on a salver close at hand. Norris noticed the noise and reached out to separate the glasses with a touch that verged on petulancy. "When in the world are they coming?" he questioned, as though in defence of his action. "I can't stay here all day waiting, . . . and I can't move without help. Look here, you might see how things are going, eh?"

The second mate rose unsteadily from his seat and went to the window. After a minute he returned, and taking the whisky bottle poured a stiff dose. "The boats are out," he said, "it's likely they're picking folk up. They're bringing someone up the gangway now. I can't see, it's too dhark."

He drank off the spirit and flounced back to the settee.

Norris looked up, throwing a casual glance at the man sitting there with chin sunk at rest, and finding him brooding, instantly searched him with his eyes. What did he think? Did he think anything, or was he as dense an ass as the chief who had sat and smoked and yarned with him these months unthinking? He could not say. He observed that he was flushed with the liquor he had consumed; that his brow was distinctly marked; but he was not sufficiently calm to discover that the Irishman battled with the problem with which he battled, but in another fashion. •

He put further sting into his words, demanding attention. "I'm dead lame," he asserted, "and there's my wife and . . . and little ones out there, perhaps drowning, while you sit still, . . . oh, damnation! can't you hear?"

The latter in caustic commentary on his companion's apathy.

The second mate looked up breathing defiance. He was not there to be bullied and hectorated by a man who had openly given the order under which he now lay humiliated and in a position of degradation; by a man now without the smallest vestige of authority or any sign of command.

He had leaped as his captain had leaped, out of sheer scare at the appalling swiftness of that knife-like blow, and because of his proximity to safety. What had happened in the moments following neither could have stated. They found themselves in the commander's room with a doctor and attendants bending over them, proffering restoratives, comfort at hand. Yes, Mr Flynn could hear. He said so with thick enunciation, staring at his empty glass. "We're both in the same boat, sonny," he asserted, brazenly; "sink or swim, we've got to shtick together, shpin the same yarn and hold to it like grim death to a mop-shtick. Yes, sorr, I do hear. Pass the whisky."

The question of the portrait faded. Captain Norris leaned forward, tapping impotently with his fist on the table. "Do you know what you are saying, . . . do you understand—what, . . . eh, what?" he paused, speechless at the other's audacity, his lips working, eyes twitching, head thrust forward.

And the Irishman gave him his answer. "Do I understand? Sorr, I do—bad cess to it, I do. I'm in a hat, but you're lying underneath an' I'm sitting on ye. I look like being broke, but you are broke for certainty. Then, as for me, I've always got the plough to fall back upon as you've said, but you know nothing av ut, an' are too great to larn—good! I'm on top."

"Do I understand?" he proceeded gravely, waving an empty glass. "Sorr, I do. Do I think I'll use it? Sorr, I do—an' be the same token I'd thank ye for a handle tu me name, if I may be so bhowld. I'm not on the poop deck now. Mind that. . . . Pass the whisky!"

At the beginning of this annoyance Captain Norris had stared; as it did not cease, and Flynn proceeded, with raised voice, he struggled to rise, but fell back groaning. Then sitting in his chair he lifted his eyes to search this

man who had so suddenly leaped out of hand, to search him, cajole him, and bring him back to the fold.

What did Flynn mean—what did he suggest? Did he suggest anything, or was it merely the potency of the whisky for which he continually clamoured? Did he think anything, and if he thought, would he give tongue to it—would he? Norris with all his superiority, with all his advantages in education and intellect, was unable to say. He pushed the bottle across with some attempt at jocularity—"Certainly, . . . certainly," he said, "and if I spoke to you otherwise than I should, I ask your pardon—will that suffice?"

Flynn was mollified at once. He withdrew the stopper, and poured a four-finger nip into his glass. "Sorr," he remarked, "here's that I may get dhrunk, . . . blind, speechless dhrunk—Amin!" He drank the spirit American fashion, taking a small gulp of water to wash it down. He lifted his hand to his head, touching it gingerly. "I got a nasty one there," he explained, "when we jumped—we, sorr, we!"

The captain twisted in his seat, hiding his face.

"'Shamed are ye?" Flynn cried out with thickening accents, "so'm I, . . . but there's no 'casion. We had to jump, . . . or get shwept out av ut. . . . But it's you that gave the worrd—min' that!"

He rose from his seat and approached the table, glass in hand—"Pass the whisky!" he ordered, "an' dhrink fair. No heel taps—savvy?" he lifted his hand, touching his forehead as he came, "thish blamed cut, . . . is it cut? . . . shmart. Shay, . . . is it cut?"

Norris raised his eyes to look, and beheld the man intent on the whisky, pouring out a further dram. It seemed best at that moment to allow him to guzzle at will. That he should be speechless, senseless, dead, as he desired, when those strangers came, was what Norris prayed, facing him with twitching muscles. His disgrace was visible to all who could read. There was no necessity to proclaim it from the bridge of a mailship, to shout it into the idiot ears of all those who would presently judge him—he who was captain, he who had left his crew with



one swift order, he who had left his wife and two children for others to save or see drown!

The thought burned in a brain made responsive by the anguish of imagination. He sat there visibly cowed, visibly tortured, watching this man who an hour ago had moved at his slightest nod. He heard him drumming that unwise order of his with a voice of iron—"It's you that gave the word—mind that!" As though it were possible he could ever forget! And this was the man he had taken from the fore-castle and promoted.

He cursed the day when he had done this thing; cursed the sickly reason that had driven forth the officer in whose shoes Flynn stood; cursed the idiocy, the paltry jealousy, that had made it possible; then sat back in his chair, aware that his enemy had swallowed the dram and was ready with his tongue.

Nor had he long to wait. Flynn, undamaged as to limb, but bruised heavily over the temples, came unsteadily towards him, labouring with speech.

"I said, . . . plain queschun," he remarked with becoming gravity, "ish thish cut cut, . . . or is it on'y brouge? That's wha' I wansh—to—know, . . . eh? Ansher me plain one time." He lurched to the table and smote it with his fist, staring, appallingly serious, at his commander.

Norris looked up with quivering nostrils. "It is, not cut—it is bruised only," he said. "Take it easy, man, take it easy."

Flynn listened with profound gravity. The suggestion seemed to tickle him. He lurched a trifle nearer, bending low to search his companion's face, then staggered backwards and reached the settee. He sat down suddenly, with a look of vague apprehension depicted in eyes that registered every emotion—laughter, anger, hope, desire, despair. He sat there clutching the end of the settee as though he feared it would jib, his jaw working, his eyes roving, a smile of sheer imbecility spreading like a curtain over his face.

"That—show?" he questioned presently. Then, with sudden effort, "Musht take s'more whiskysh. . . . Doc'

saysh all right, . . . pull chap together, . . . had bad timesh, ye know. Had to jumpsh—cause ole man give—ordersh, . . . min' that!"

Norris leaned at the edge of the table with sunken gaze. He knew that the man was beginning to drivel. It seemed possible that he would sleep, and that when he awoke there would be an opportunity to form some plan, to arrange some method by which neither should suffer—neither. . . . The thoughts died. From without came the noise of cheering, trilled orders on the pipes, and a great clatter of men moving swiftly on the promenade. Norris glanced up, but Flynn made no sign of having heard. The steam broke roaring from the escapes, deadening every other sound; again it died, and the shouts and cries and orders echoed through the cabin on the background of the booming gale. Flynn slept. The captain was left with his thoughts.

Out there folk were at work saving the lives of men whose destinies he had controlled; out there his wife and children struggled amidst waters he had escaped. He wondered how they fared—whether any aided them, whether they had reached the deck in time for any one to aid them, whether . . .

He leaned forward moaning. The questions stifled him. His position oppressed him. He moved a trifle, and strove to foot the deck. But the agony was too acute: he fell back again, shuddering, and in a bath of sweat. Captain Norris was not cast in an heroic mould. Pain appealed to him more rudely, so it seemed, than to others; it took less to disable him, less to produce the irritation which had become so noticeable of late. Yet Norris was a sailor who had been accustomed all his life to face difficulty, danger, and death unflinching—with eyes wide set. Once he had been hard as nails, as the saying goes; once he had been impervious to criticism—yet now he sat huddled and moaning with the stress of a sprained ankle while wife and children fought the seas. The lapse yawned. Between the two presentments lay the whole gamut of descent—but Norris did not see it. He nursed a sprained ankle as a dog nurses a hurt on emerging from a fight—whimpering.

He gazed across at his companion and saw that he slept. Whisky was the means by which he had attained that end. He envied the man his oblivion—he envied him his small, unthinking brain. At that moment the only thing worth seeking was—oblivion, forgetfulness, sleep. They were necessities for which he suffered—but he could not sleep. His brain throbbed, his eyes proclaimed the mental stress he endured—thoughts leaped, died, recurred, and strove amidst a tangle of jarring fancies to force a passage by which he might escape unscathed. But all ended in one deep humiliation. He had given the order, and the man sleeping his whisky-born sleep would presently awake to confront him with it—to shout his own innocence and the paltry cowardice of his commander. It was unthinkable.

Again, there was that annoying incident of the picture, carrying words at the foot of it he could not read. His eyes took it in as the memory returned, and he reached out and drew it to him. He knew that face—the words told him how—

“To my friend Callaghan, in memory of a very pleasant trip. R.M.S. *Sentinel*. May 1902.

“J. S., R.A.”

The picture fell to the table, and Norris leaned back in his chair, his hands joined. They were cold—clammy. “Good God!” he said, “Callaghan.”

Someone passed the door talking loudly, and Norris looked up at the sound. “We have saved a few, of course, but the rest are gone. There’s no doubt about that. . . . Might have been worse, though, seeing the weather . . .”

Norris raised his voice, crying out—“On deck there! On deck!” But the talkers passed out of ken, and the only result of his prayer showed in the movement of his companion lying inert on the settee. Still, he did not wake. He only muttered, insanely gripping the pillows.

Again a period of waiting befell. Norris listening, intent, fumbling with the new knowledge that had come to him; the sleeper grumbling. The pipes still trilled occasionally. The engines moved sometimes astern, some-

times ahead—but of all that was passing out there where wind and sea made revel, only the paltriest details were visible. They moved astern: they moved ahead: a sea struck them: someone was shouting. Callaghan was in command and would know, . . . the knowledge was agony.

Night was gone, and a grey twilight filtered through the drawn blinds when at length the end came. Norris had been for some time lying forward, his head buried on one arm, which rested on the table. Whether he dozed or remained alert it was impossible to say; but he moved quickly to attention as a footstep halted without, and the latch stirred in its socket.

He lifted his hand to smooth his moustache, giving the points a dexterous twist which trained them upward. A shudder ran through him. He patted his chest, drew down a shirt cuff, and placed one hand upon his knee. Then a voice fell upon his ears. Someone was giving instructions which predicated a resumption of the mail-ship's passage, and Norris drooped. One can only put it so—his elasticity, his pride of pose was gone. Callaghan spoke.

"Tell the chief officer to get the boats hoisted and secured as speedily as possible, and ask him, as soon as he can spare a moment, to come to my room. . . . And you, Thomson, let me know directly we can get ahead."

There was no hurry about that voice. It was calm, cool—perhaps a trifle stern, but there was no suggestion of flurry. Some one replied in the orthodox fashion, and he who had first spoken stepped within. He closed the door carefully, then moved across holding out his hand.

"Norris!" he said quietly.

The man in the chair drew himself together as though he had received a blow. A moment later he lifted his head, squared his shoulders, and saw the proffered hand. He seemed about to ignore it. A queer flicker dawned in his eyes. Second thoughts prevailed. He leaned forward and took it.

"Yes," he said. "Norris—er—how goes it, Callaghan?"

"Then you knew me, Arthur?"

"Who but a friend would act as you have acted?" Norris questioned, suddenly livid. "Know you! Gad! how can I help knowing you when you stick that in front of me, . . . devilish good likeness it is, too."

The rasp in his voice and the quick movement of his eyes were the only signals he gave of his knowledge that he was down,—that he was aware he had failed when necessity required that he should win. Callaghan, with his acute perception, saw it, and the recognition pained him. He glanced at this friend of his and said, a trifle shamedly,—

"For the first time in my life I am sorry to meet you."

"Sorry!" the other threw out. "Good God!"

Callaghan had nothing to say.

"I am glad to know you feel it," Norris remarked, his eyes on the deck, his lips working. "The fact is," he went on, blurting the difficult sentences—"the fact is, the whole affair was shamefully boggled. You should have got out of the way earlier—how did I know you were going to . . . to . . . you had no right . . ."

Callaghan moved closer, his face drawn with pain. "Look here, old chap," he said quietly, "need we go into that?"

"You had no right—no earthly right to be going at such speed," Norris jerked out, twisting at his moustache, struggling pitifully for calm. "In five minutes ~~we~~ were all in the water. Do you know what that means?—five minutes!"

Callaghan made no reply. He sat down beside this friend of his who was smitten so heavily, watching the nervous, flickering eyes and wondering. Seeing very distinctly the phase through which he was passing: seeing, too, the actuality so vividly conjured in that phrase—"five minutes, and we were all in the water!"

But Norris recognised nothing of this; he took up the plaint much as a sick child bemoans the loss of a toy. He could not shake it off, he could not rid himself of the appalling knowledge that at this crisis, when by all the traditions he should have acted the man, he had succumbed—that is how he put it in his mind—he had

succumbed. He blundered on, looking now at Callaghan, now at the deck. "And if it was necessary for you to race as you were racing, the least you could have done—the very least, was to keep a smart look-out. My lights were burning. I had my horn going, . . . there was no excuse, . . . no excuse. By God! Callaghan, a child would have avoided collision. I mean it—a child!"

"Were you on deck yourself?" Callaghan questioned, with a face of iron, unreadable.

"I was!" came the answer, blurted, irascible. "I waited for you to act as any sailor would have acted; but you did nothing—nothing. You came on, pounding on that damnable hooter of yours, without a word of apology, . . . but you, I presume, were below. You have officers you can trust, not blind idiots such as we sailing-ship skippers are compelled to put up with, . . . and this," he decided, throwing up his hands, "this is the result."

"Wrong there, Norris. I was on deck myself—and, as you insist on discussing the position, I should have acted sooner had we seen your lights sooner."

"Do you suggest our lights were not burning properly?"

"I suggest nothing."

"Er . . . I beg your pardon—but you gave the . . ."

"Need we go into these things?" Callaghan interrupted a trifle sternly.

"I must. It is essential that I should know how I stand. Man! don't you see that I am broken—broken, . . . that unless I can establish a . . . a . . . defence, I am . . . oh! It's complicated, damnably complicated by the fact that you are you and I am I. If you were any one else I could stand on my hand. I could even give you points, but now," his eye roved taking in the settee where his subordinate lounged asleep, his mouth set for flies. He pointed angrily to this new proof of his position, saying querulously—"And look at that beast too. Pleasant, isn't it?"

Callaghan turned round. "Who is he?" he asked.

"My second mate—drunk with shame."

"Shame?"

"Precisely—you see he jumped. Left others to sink . . . or swim, . . . saved his own precious carcass, you know, . . . heroic, eh, what?" said Norris with a gust of laughter horrible to hear.

Callaghan rose from his seat and touched the bell. Norris instantly sobered—

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Put him out of this."

"Er, . . . but he is hurt, . . . you might leave him. At least, . . . don't you think it would be wise, . . . for a time?"

"Not I," said Callaghan, and turned to speak to his servant.

The lad departed, and the two men sat facing each other, Callaghan absorbed, resting his elbows on the arms of his chair, Norris pulling at his moustache, his gaze flickering, shaken beyond words.

Silence ensued. From without came the whir of hoisting boats, the hum of the gale and the slash of seas. A whistle sounded—a long, trilling, silvery note rising and falling on the wind, and with it came Norris's suggestion, torn from him by the stress of his position.

"Let me call him, Dick. Don't send your men to him, . . . there will be a scene and . . . he's not a baby, you know. Let me call him."

Callaghan rose and touched the bell. There was something so haggard in his friend's look, something so undeniably pitiful in his intonation, that he had not the heart to refuse. He touched the bell, gave an order, and crossed over to the settee. "Very well," he said, "I will call him myself. What's his name?"

"Flynn," said Norris; then again, as Callaghan touched him, "Hi, there—Flynn! Turn out, man—turn out."

Flynn rolled over, requesting those who disturbed his slumbers to go to the eastern gate of Hades. He expressed his opinion that there wasn't a thundering man in the ship he wouldn't fight—and in response to a distinct push from Callaghan, sat up squaring his fists.

Then his eyes fell upon the scene. Norris over there, white, anxious, signalling him to obey; Callaghan, in a

uniform that showed his rank, standing by his side, shaking him; and in an instant the animosity with which he had sunk to rest flared out—

"Wha-ger want?" he questioned with surly intonation. "Why can'ch yer let man go shleep—eh?"

"Flynn!" Norris cried out, "they have prepared a bed for you down-stairs. Go and turn in, man, go and turn in."

"All-ri here. Damn good bedsh, thish," Flynn announced, leaning back.

"But I require it, sir," Captain Callaghan remarked. "Be good enough to get up and go below."

"Leave him to me," Norris groaned. "Leave him to me."

"Juss—so," said the other, rising truculently. "You lissen wha' he tellsh you. He'sh my shkipper, . . . good shkipper too, . . . tole me to jump. Gave order all proper, . . . then he jump an' I jumpsh, . . . all jumpsh—see?"

He lurched to his feet and made for the door—"All-ri, I go," he said. "But thatsh the chap ash made me—jumpsh. Min' that!"

He opened the door and stumbled on deck, where he was received at once by the men who waited.

Inside the room Callaghan returned to his chair and bent over the arms, leaning his chin in one hand. Norris drew himself together with an effort, looked up, caught his friend's glance, and flung out across the table, face buried—

"I can't stand this!" he cried. "My God! I can't stand this." ●

## CHAPTER IX.

### OPPOSITE POLES.

The two men remained some time in silence, gazing abstractedly at the objects which fronted them. Callaghan found it difficult to break through the constraint that had



fallen, for, in ordinary conditions, the less a man says at these times the less there is for counsel to bandy in the courts. But these were not ordinary conditions. Norris was his friend. Together they had been cadets on the *Worcester*. Together, with linked arms, they had roamed the country at the back of Greenhithe village; together they had boated, taken leave, visited the tuck shop and fought the yokels; and since that time had sailed together, met in distant countries, and always kept in touch.

When Norris wanted money Callaghan lent his purse; when Callaghan was stoney Norris raised the wind; they were friends sworn—Callaghan the leader, Norris the reliant, sunny-hearted chum, full of life, full of laughter. Now Norris sat there with twitching muscles and a tongue haltingly blurting details of his unreadiness.

Again, there was Ethel Norris. The last time Callaghan had seen her she was a bride—his friend's bride—and he was best man, buoyantly taking charge of her cousin. He made his first speech on that day, a halting, pointless oration, which had been received as wit and eloquence: now Ethel Norris was in a cabin below borrowing dry clothes of the wife of a magnate, and her husband sat in Callaghan's chair unmindful of her existence—so it appeared.

Callaghan rose and paced slowly to and fro the room. He was a man of action, a man of plain speech. He could see that it was necessary to get hold of Flynn and silence him; that it was essential to keep him as a friend, and not allow him to drift over to the enemy.

"You take this too much to heart, Arthur," he said at length; "shake it off. The man's drunk—no one will give credence to a drunken man's babble. I certainly do not. Pull yourself together. Face it."

"Face it!" Norris returned with a touch of scorn; "could you face it?"

"Please God, I'd have a good try," said Callaghan with grim brevity.

Norris drew himself up, he appeared to consider the matter in the light of a new suggestion, but presently

relapsed again, shaking his head — "Can't," he said simply.

"There is no such word in the book," Callaghan announced with set lips.

"In yours, no—but in mine?"

Callaghan moved up to his friend's chair and laid one hand on his shoulder—

"A man is master of his own destiny," he said tensely; "he can do anything he chooses to do. If he wills a course of action, he can carry it out."

Norris looked up with a gesture of disapproval—

"Pish!" he exclaimed; "that is the doctrine of self-confidence and optimism. You seem to forget that I am the conglomerate product of centuries; that I have inherited traits, convolutions of thought, action, and all the bag-o'-tricks, from which I can no more drag myself than your ship can drag old England westward."

"It may be optimism," Callaghan returned swiftly, "but if so, it is better than the pessimism you are giving rein to. Nonsense. Shake it off—there is no occasion for me to preach, you know it as well as I do."

Norris moved a trifle under the lash of this plain speech, then half-shamedly, half-cynically said—

"Yes, but the will must be there, . . . er . . . I have no will for this kind of thing; no decision, if you like it better—and, I am married."

Callaghan shrank at the caustic conclusion, but he attributed it, together with the evident loss of self-control, to the ordeal through which his friend had passed, and for which, primarily, he was responsible. He cast about him for some aid, some stimulant, that should enable him to get the matter to terms, and his eye alighted on the decanter—

"Have a whisky peg, it will pull you together," he advised.

"And get like that beast you have put out. Right, Dick—yes, I'll have the peg. Anything is better than this . . . this . . ." he paused, vaguely passing one hand over his forehead—"even drunkenness," he concluded with a bitter intonation.

Callaghan made no remark, but found glasses and poured out the whisky. Norris drank, smacked his lips, drank again, and set down the tumbler with an air of finality—"Yes," he decided, "perhaps you were right. I feel better. Let me see—where were we?"

"I suggest we see Flynn, and show him which side his bread is buttered. You have no quarrel with him? No. Nor he with you? Very well. It is easily settled. The man is in his cups, and we must see that he doesn't repeat these stupid statements when he gets sober. That ends the trouble as far as Flynn is concerned."

"Yes—but it does not put me back in command of the *Coorong*—it does not do away with the fact that I am broken," Norris expostulated.

Callaghan shrugged his shoulders—"Who knows?" he returned; "perhaps it is I who am broken."

"You have no encumbrances," Norris announced, shading his eyes; "Ethel worships muscle, deeds. She loves heroes. Brain is not in the same category. It is too subtle a thing for the comprehension of most women, . . . er . . . and Ethel will despise me. It is the only logical outcome. The majority of women would despise me. It is inevitable."

Callaghan rose and moved rapidly across and across the room, his face stern, his eyes drawn with pain—

"Arthur," he cried out, "if I didn't know what has happened, and the stress you have passed through, I should be inclined to think you as gross a coward as your words suggest. If I did not remember your love for that bright girl you made your wife, and remember, too, the fact that you and I are old and fast friends, I should be inclined to think you disloyal to your wife and sick of my friendship. But I refuse to give credence to either hypothesis. You are shaken by this trouble. I have brought upon you, and I pass it by."

He paused in his walk, and standing before the drooping man still seated in the chair, went on more slowly—

"No one can foresee the result of this business begun out here in the rough and tumble of a gale,—no one can predict how it will be viewed at the courts; but I, as

you say, have no encumbrances, and if it will help you I tell you this—if there is to be any bother with the certificates, I will stand by you. If there is to be any breaking, you may look upon it that I shall be the man they will break."

Norris moved in his chair, reaching out to grip his friend's hand. "Thanks, old chap," he said. "Yes, I know you mean it. But it won't lie with you, . . . it will lie with me—and putting aside conjecture, and looking at things from the bed rock of fact, it is the sailing-ship skipper who goes to the wall, the man who has encumbrances who is the sufferer—willy-nilly—he can't help it. It is fate."

It seemed useless to argue with such pessimism. To a man holding Callaghan's views it was waste of time. The sounds on deck told him that he might expect to be summoned to the bridge at any moment. Yet there was one thing to be said. Ethel Norris and the two children were below, and, so far, although her name had been mentioned casually, almost cynically mentioned, Norris had made no inquiries as to the fate of these encumbrances who, in the nature of things, must be very dear to him. It was possible he feared to put the question. It was possible, indeed, in the chaos to which he was reduced, that some freak of memory was the cause of an omission which, in Callaghan's mind, loomed as a monstrous lapse, and as nothing less. He leaned a moment by the table and stood looking down.

"I shall have to be going on deck directly," he remarked. "I think the wife and youngsters will be glad to know . . ."

Norris glanced up with a shudder that might have been from pain.

"That they are safe?" he questioned.

"Yes, I have seen them."

"Er . . . thank God!" came tardily from the sensitive lips. "What did Ethel say—eh, what?"

"She asked for you. She would have been here, but I begged her to get into dry clothes first."

"How were they saved?" Norris questioned.

"I believe the mate brought them."

"Calston?"

"I don't know his name."

Norris's face fell. "Calston," he remarked. "Hum! . . . 'honest John,' she calls him, . . . she was always very fond of Calston—and I jumped! Good God! Dick, send them up, or have me taken down, . . . yes, down. Why, hang it all, you don't mean to say you can't see I'm dead lame? Can't move, . . . can't foot the blessed deck any more than . . ." he glanced about, searching for a metaphor, and his eyes fell on the commander's cot hanging from the beams by its tackles,—“any more than that cot can,” he concluded weakly, irascible, despite the tension.

Callaghan crossed quickly and bent over him.

"I didn't know. I must have been blind," he said. "Gad! I am sorry—has the doctor seen you?"

"Damn the doctor—bring them to me!" Norris almost shouted.

Callaghan made no ado, but left the room at once and went to the saloon. Mrs Norris, dry and radiantly pretty in borrowed finery, met him as he entered. She held out her hand with a wistful smile.

"I was just coming to find Arthur," she cried. "Where is he? . . . is he . . .?"

"Quite safe, in my room."

Ethel Norris clasped her hands, smiling brightly through the welling tears. "Oh, I am so thankful—so thankful. . . . You are sure he is *quite* safe?"

"Quite."

"Take me to him, please."

They mounted the stairs, people falling back in the grey light to give them passage. Mrs Norris scarcely seemed to see them. She passed up with so much verve, laughing, talking, plainly on the edge of tears.

"What a meeting!" she cried. "Poor old *Coorong*. . . . You were too big for our tiny cockleshell. But it might have been worse. . . . You have been so good, too—and the men so brave! People have done everything . . . more. Just look at the dress I wear, . . . rustles, posi-

tively rustles! And all those sailors drowned. . . . Where is it you have him hidden?"

They came to the door, which Callaghan opened, and in a moment Mrs Norris had crossed the room and fallen on her knees beside her husband.

"Oh, Arthur, . . . thank God, . . . thank God!" came from her before Callaghan could withdraw, and as the door snapped, Norris's rejoinder—"Carefully, child. . . . Hang it all, mind my foot!"

The lapse widened.

Half an hour later, with boats again lashed in the davits and the crew relieved of their cumbersome belts, the *Sentinel* moved away from the litter of planks and spars and bobbing buckets, and faced the Atlantic bluster.

Rain fell. The seas charged. Watches went below, numbed and drenched by the downpour, until time, checking the calendar, pointed to Saturday, and Long Island crept up the horizon clear as the blue-toned water sparkling in the sunshine.

Then people came out from their imprisonment, and chatted as though such a thing as collision and death had not come near them. Ethel Norris had won hearts, especially among the men; Norris had lost even those which at first were his. Mankind voted him a fraud, and said that foot or ankle of his was part of the fraud. They desired ardently to be informed what that delightful woman could have seen in him to induce her to marry him, and their adjectives pointed to the depth of feeling betrayed.

Colonel Marchmont was, perhaps, one of the many who thought these things and said nothing. He was enthralled by the woman's beauty and the bell-like clarity of her voice. She sang nightly in the saloon. But the children, Jacky and Claire, bemoaned the loss of their playfellow, Mr Cals'on; and despite the invitations to play and pictures in the drawing-room, kept the deck with solemn little faces, watched the bobbing pistons, and talked with a new restraint.

The *Coorong* was gone! Their toys were gone! Meekings was gone! John Calston and thirteen others were gone!—there was no one now who could sing “Whisky-johnny.” . . .

The children stared at the waters as though they expected to see their heroes in the depths.

## ACT II.—IN THE GREY CITY.

### CHAPTER X.

#### HELEN ASKS A QUESTION.

NEW YORK has few attractions for persons of limited means, and for shipwrecked crews none at all. In the hustle of that great hive they stand in peril of getting mauled and trodden under foot. Therefore the Norris family decided to make no long stay.

For two days the papers rang the changes of the *Coorong* disaster. On the first of them double-led type proclaimed in hysterical headings this "Thrilling narrative of the sea," this "Sensational account of the heroism of a British crew," with variations galore. On the second they published lengthy personal experiences from people who, knowing nothing definite of the matter in hand, embroidered without shame.

Reporters, debarred of access to the principals, extracted snippets from the crew, and ladled them out for a wondering people to read at breakfast, in the cars, or on the street. They invented subtle methods of interviewing these heroes of the moment. An inspector of wharves turned out to be a prospector in journalism; a harbour authority became unmasked as an authority from the Yellow Press. The papers shrieked of the disaster. The force of the gale assumed that of a hurricane; the charge of the seas became as the onslaught of mountains. Men were depicted as "gibbering like apes," nerveless, destitute of reason—they always gibber like apes in the Yellow



journalism—but by some merciful chance, or even merciful discretion, one knows not which, Captain Norris and his obsession came not into print.

How he searched the papers, how greedily he devoured their contents, on those two days may be gleaned very readily by those who have attained a moment's starriness; and for the others—well, here at all hazards one may say without trespass, may they rest in ignorance.

The third day saw the affair already relegated to the foot of a column headed by other blazonments; the fourth had forgotten it; and on the fifth the family were afloat once more, this time "by favour of the British Consul." Thus in company of some other tatterdemalions, entered on Government books as "distressed seamen," they recrossed the Atlantic and got to their home on the Wirral.

Home—the Wirral! Herein were the Norrises not as those tatterdemalions with whom they had crossed. A paternal Government, busy abolishing the mercantile marine, would be under no necessity to follow up or give aid in their case—nor would it be petitioned. As far as the Norrises were concerned, it would be permitted to sleep as it usually sleeps when shipping or the interests of voiceless shipmen is in question. Home awaited them—home, with a certain joint competence and dark-eyed artist Helen standing to welcome them as she had never welcomed them before. The house was ready. A month ago, in anticipation of this moment, she had got rid of its tenants, and now it stood open-armed as she was, peaceful, quiet, lovable as she was, to give them rest and shelter.

Far out of the ken of the grey streets and busy river it stood. High up, catching gleams of the Dee and the eternal majesty of the mountains bordering it, it lay on the verge of Nocturnum—old, sturdy, yellow-washed, staring at the tide of bricks and mortar slowly advancing to swallow it.

Heath Cottage, as the house was called, had belonged to the Norris family for generations. There was nothing about it that did not point to some work of the roving

Norris blood, nor, to speak the truth, to their lack of business ability. A Norris who had been admiral of the fleet in the days when wooden walls and fighting brought fame to England, had procured an Act of Parliament, a thing Norris often examined, and cut the entail. After that this gorgeous old sea-dog, who figured largely complaisant on the dining-room wall, proceeded to cut the property; and thereafter, as far as can be discerned at this distance, each succeeding Norris had left his mark upon the extent of the domain—chipped, as it were, into the body politic—a block off here, a branch off there: this one in fields and pasture, that one in trees felled for timber, this one in stock and the home farm, until it came to Arthur, the mercantile marine descendant of a race of filibusters, naval officers, and administrators, in the guise of a modern suburban home surrounded by timbered and tinselled structures of the Gothic-Queen-Anne-Jacobean type, and the noise and turmoil of a city alarmingly intent on the acquisition of wealth.

Down there, beyond its walls, were Oxtou, Claughton, and neighbouring suburbs pushing resolutely to smother it. Across the way were the relics of the village it had dominated, an old sign outside a public-house the one indication of what had existed as a hamlet. From the grey distance came the smoke of Liverpool pungently regular with each easterly breeze. From beyond the high trees, the elms and birch which screened it, the roar of electric trams, the clash of their gongs, and, on certain winds, the voices of the streets continually at war.

It was to this home that Norris brought his bride, the beautiful Ethel Challoner, after his marriage, and here he had left her with his cousin during the enforced absences which fell to his lot as a commander in the merchant service. And so for some three years she had remained; then, partly answering her desire to be with him always and partly to effect economies, the two had sailed together in the *Coorong*, and the house had been leased to strangers.

Now the Norrises had returned to their own, and their own stood smiling in a brief wintry sunshine to welcome

them. But the past, hallowed by memory, was gone, vanished with the old *Coorong*. A new era dawned. The ship which had been their home existed now simply as an adjunct to the law courts, as a means of providing matter to snarl over, fees for attorneys; and the joint income of Norris, Ethel, and Helen together would suffice only to keep "the cottage," as they loved to term it, out of the hands of the agents. It was a position demanding care—a position in which the smallest extravagance, the smallest inattention, would be sufficient to bring the time-worn walls upon them.

With prudence and the old singleness of aim it would be easy to continue as before, despite the fact that Arthur was now among the great army of the unemployed; but Helen speedily discovered there were straying tendencies in this family newly escaped from the ordeal of the sea.

Arthur had lost his buoyancy. He seemed suddenly to have grown old. Ethel had lost, in a great measure, her sunniness. She no longer rippled into song as she moved about the house, her laugh was less spontaneous. She was colder, yet apparently she was unaware of it; but it stood out for any observer to see, and Helen was mystified.

It seemed that Arthur's prophecy was on the way to consummation. It is difficult to say precisely when and how estrangement arises. It is too subtle, too unadvised. A sentence spoken perhaps in jest may fire the train laid by an inner knowledge of the heart of the speaker. Something of this kind had occurred. The moment of stress and battle Ethel had almost anticipated when she prayed Calston to remember Jacky and Claire, and before which all men should rise, had found her husband unprepared, unready to prove his claim to manhood. He had saved himself. He had forgotten even his wife. The surmise grew by slow degrees to certainty. At work stitching the kinder's garments, sitting in the *Sentinel's* music-room, the glances caught, the fragments of conversation—all pointed to the one solution. Arthur, her husband, had given himself up to the terror of a moment, and had forgotten those he should have guarded with his life.

There are some women who would have read pityingly between the lines, and would have seen in the blurted sentences and half-acknowledgments some reason for withholding the judgment of cold logic; there are some whose love would have taken a stronger hold, who would have striven to shield the man whose obsession was apparent; but in their case one must predicate love of a deeper kind than is to be found in most modern marriages, the love that is proof against misfortune, penury, suffering,—all that stands on the threshold of life except the one thing that is anathema, the one thing before which even hatred is just.

But this love Ethel had not. She was too bright, too vivacious to hold any great depth of feeling. Affectionate, yes; charming, unquestioned; lovable, without doubt,—but innately of the butterfly type, revelling in the good things of this world, and discontented if the means were not at hand to procure them.

To a man as sensitive as Arthur it was appalling to read the gradual development of his theory. The perception which had enabled him to suggest such a conclusion was sharpened by the fact of its arrival. He saw slights where none were intended. He carried away words which sheltered within them scarcely anything annoying, and treasured them as snubs administered with dexterity. Man is very desirous of appearing first in the eyes of those he loves, and, conversely, he is very jealous of any suggestion pointing to his inferiority. This is perhaps noticeably so in the type we term artistic—and this man, this galled and hungry sufferer, was pre-eminently an artist, a man to caress and push to higher flights, to shelter from the stinging self-reproach which had fallen upon him and now rode him spurring so viciously.

The family had returned perhaps a week when one evening Ethel and Helen sat in the drawing-room dallying over their last cup of tea. A cosy fire burned in the grate, and as the daylight waned it threw rosy gleams across the sedate old room, bringing into relief brass and silver ornaments standing on the rich-toned Sheraton furniture, marking the outlines of bureau and table sunk

in deeper shadow, drawing attention to the ivory whiteness of the piano's keyboard resting silent to woo the fingers of the magician who had scarcely yet found time to touch them.

Ethel leaned dreamily back in her chair. Tea was finished, but she did not ring, and Helen, cosily seated before the fire, wondered for the second time where Arthur could be. At this Ethel glanced up to say—

"Arthur? Oh, in Liverpool, I expect, . . . or in his room." She dismissed the matter from her mind and fell again upon her reverie.

"He used to be so regular at tea-time," Helen pursued, after a pause. "That is why I asked."

"I know it—but he is changed."

"How?"

"Well, for instance, he doesn't come to tea."

This was so apparent, and the voice said so distinctly, behind the mere words, that Ethel declined to discuss the matter, that Helen agreed to dismiss it. She suffered her eyes to rove about the room, taking note of the points of light, the rich effect of that warm, red shadow, the hinted outlines, and retired into the artist's dream of reproduction until Ethel's voice called her again to the affairs of a forgotten tea-table.

"Have another cup, dear? No—well, shall I ring for lights?"

Once more Helen said "No," adding that it was the one hour of the day given to memories and imagination. Ethel acknowledged it. It was evident that she desired to make amends for the curt dismissal of a subject which would obtrude. She continued brightly—

"It reminds me, just now especially, of our evenings on the *Sentinel*. Colonel Marchmont used to get me into the music-room after dinner, and twice I played and sang in the dusk. Of course there were a lot of people there," she threw out in wider explanation, "but most of them didn't understand music, so we had it all to ourselves. I wish you could hear him, Helena. He plays the violin like a master—actually *plays* it. He has soul. It

creeps out every time he touches the strings—and his method of putting in an obligato is marvellous. No notes. He just shuts his eyes and follows. Then the people, even those who don't understand, go into raptures.

"One evening—oh, it was so brilliant, so brisk!—I was sitting at the piano almost alone before dinner. The lights had not been switched on, and the glow of a fiery sunset came through the ports and touched the room with gold. I was singing—one of your favourites, dear, 'The Sands of Dee'—when I heard a violin chime in. The notes were so soft and full of tenderness, so round, that I dared not look to see who played. I just sang on, my voice quivering, and at the end I turned and saw Colonel Marchmont. That was the first time he heard me sing, the first time he brought out his fiddle—and I don't think I shall ever forget the effect.

"If I could sing as he plays, I should be a star. No need to trouble further about ways and means. It would be easy—easy, . . . all too easy, perhaps. Who knows?"

The words rang in Helen's ears. She had no answer for the beautiful face, fire-lit at the edge of the rug. She sat on gazing abstractedly at the soft cheek glowing so rosily against the darker shadows, listening to the charm of the voice as it told of those nights on the *Sentinel*, and wondering, wondering, till presently the door opened and Norris came in. He crossed the room at once and stood with his back to the fire.

"Had a long day again," he remarked, "and now I'm tired. Got any tea?"

Ethel rang for a fresh supply and Norris attacked the viands. "Hungry, too," he said. "Scarcely a minute for lunch, and a beastly cold day. What were you talking of?"

Helen told him.

"Oh, of a wonderful fiddler you met on the *Sentinel*. Ethel says he is another Sarasate."

"Might be," Ethel corrected, smiling. "Unfortunately he is rich."

"I met?" Norris questioned. "I may have done so—but I don't remember him, and I certainly did not hear him. Who was it?"

"Colonel Marchmont."

"The man who gave you his coat that night?"

"Yes."

Norris made no comment. He helped himself to a piece of cake, ate it, and took another. Then standing, still with his back to the fire, he asked pointedly, "Are they growing that tea, Ethel?"

For answer she touched the bell, and presently a maid entered carrying the tray. Mrs Norris poured out a cup and handed it—"Sorry you had to wait, dear. But you should be more punctual."

For some minutes there was silence. Norris sipped his tea, then replaced the cup, and said—

"Yes, I suppose you are right. But I was engaged. I didn't know the hour until I could see no longer." He crossed the room, and looking back, said, "Let them bring it upstairs. It is too hot to drink, and I can't waste time."

Ethel made no response. She touched the bell, gave the order, and sank back in her chair. "You see," she said, with a little catch in her voice, when the two were again alone, "what it is to be the wife of a novelist."

"Was he writing? . . . I thought he went to Liverpool."

"And came back apparently."

Helen leaned forward, staring at the dim white form melting so rosily into the shadows. She strove to pierce them. She strove to read in Ethel's face what Ethel thought; but the fire gave insufficient aid. She could only guess. She rested her chin on her hands, and facing her cousin, said wistfully—

"Don't think me horrid, dear; but . . . is it possible that he dislikes Colonel Marchmont?"

"I thought he said just now," came Ethel's ringing comment, "that he didn't know him."

And silence fell on the two as the shadows had fallen.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A MS. FROM THE DOLDRUMS.

When Norris announced that he was tired, he scarcely laid sufficient emphasis on the words. He was physically tired, mentally tired. A long morning in Liverpool, a mode of spending time he was learning to dread, had had the usual effect. He still heard the roar of the streets, still felt the jolt of the whizzing electric railway, still oscillated on the curves of the overhead. From nine-thirty until three in the city had done its work. Yet, on his arrival at the cottage he had gone direct to his room and seated himself to write. Come what would in the way of work, he had decided that this was imperative.

As matters fell, it was, perhaps, imperative; but, also as matters fell, it was impossible. To write sanely and with any pretence at style a man must have leisure; his brain must be at rest, unharassed. Norris had no leisure. Unfortunately, he had commanded a sailing-ship, and was in consequence a man of long absences. His presence was essential for the holding of that Board of Trade Inquiry which already sat upon him like an enemy by whom he had been overwhelmed. England has no Courts Martial or Courts Marine to adjudicate on affairs of this kind and thrash them out offhand. English sailors and other contingent sufferers from marine disasters must perforce sit down and wait until the hermaphrodite institution which presides over their destinies can, with dignity and sobriety, approach their case unflurried.

Callaghan, on the other hand, when once the matter had been reported, was free to continue his command and pursue his calling until such time as the trial loomed on the near horizon. Or, as Norris had said—"It is the sailing-ship skipper who suffers, not the commander of a liner"; and this, when one considers it, is fairly true of the result.

Again, this day Norris had been summoned to the



greater town across the water, and had beat his fingers over interviews with lawyers, owners, underwriters. It had been his province to "get hold" of an exceedingly slippery customer, a stoker from the *Sentinel*, who had offered his testimony "on terms." The terms were sufficiently exorbitant—but the lawyers had decided that he was necessary, and there the matter stood.

A case of this kind is not easily got up and disposed of. It means grist for the mill in many a lawyer's office, and the legal harness is scarcely coeval with these days of steam and ocean greyhounds. It is worn and patched, and tied with oddments out of conscience, stale and contradictory. The law of this country is not the law of that other country to which you may be opposed. A great maritime power has suggested, through its official mouth-piece, a conference of shipping men to place the law on international footing; but England, oppressed by the windy oratory of her guides, has no time to spare for solving the tribulations of persons without votes, citizens incidentally of the greatest maritime power on earth, and shipping people perforce must wait.

But this case of the *Coorong*, which had already conspired to weary Norris, was complicated more by the internal economy of owners and company law than by questions of wide international importance. At every turn it became apparent that the various interests would not sit down in harmony to adjudicate. There were, so said the lawyers, so many points of view. The owners must be studied. Company law was a bugbear—and following hotly behind came the wishes of the underwriters, the masters, the relatives of the drowned, and eventually the ultimatum of the mortgagors. At the moment this last ugliness had not reared its head, but it was there, waiting to strike, halting for the psychological moment; surveying meanwhile the angling "interests"; watching for the clash, pausing, ready lest one or the other of those astute gentlemen defending should romp in and make off with the stakes.

Thus Norris very speedily found himself in a whirl of legal argument, and discovered the necessity of obtaining

witnesses who could swear roundly, and who would hold to the story in which they were to be drilled—a very difficult matter.

The majority of people who come to court to hear a case fought out have but little conception of the work which has been put in in dingy and sometimes stuffy offices and garrets; or of the blood that has been sapped, the nerves that have been wrung in preparation for this final scene, this delicately balanced and nicely managed bout with the gloves on. It is all so hidden, so wrapped up, so coloured by respectability, that it is only by chance that any of the audience get at grips with actuality.

The great, begowned, bewigged counsel standing dignified and suave to address "m' lud" has had his case built up, pieced together, jointured, armoured, and made fire-proof, far from the chambers he occupies up town. The bars, sawdust floors, spittoons, and uncouth humanity are in it; the gin palaces, flaunting brazen ornamentation and femininity are in it; the street prowlers, the streets themselves, the offices, the garret typewriter—all are in it. Blood and nerves, strength and virility, life and death are in it—but to the casual observer, the person who comes to obtain a thrill or to get a glimpse of some scandal, none of these things are apparent. It is all dead black—black and sober as the gown of counsel; stiff as the curls in his wig. •

There were days when Norris crossed the river deciding that this afternoon would see the end of it; but that was before he was blooded, before entanglements crept out of inoffensive nooks and began to make the thing appear complex. True, the matter which first held him was the Board of Trade Inquiry into the causes which had led to the collision—but behind that ordeal lay all those other matters, and the sleight-of-hand manœuvring of this interest against that interest, and the balancing of results on this side or that side, grew daily more prolix, more involved, and to the layman ridiculous.

When Norris had first come home he had taken over one room and carried thither his papers and ideas for a new novel. It was a grand conception. A notion worthy

of genius. A man on the edge of a lawsuit, perhaps two or three, if he had strength and funds to continue; a man enmeshed in the difficulties of that preposterous *saute qui peut* to sit down and dream of literature—well, it was amazing. Yet there stood the fact. A barred door. No admission to Jacky, Claire, Helen, or even Ethel; a room comfortably warmed and a table religiously swept of all extraneous matter. A chair, pipes, tobacco, and silence—that was the notion. For the rest, well, ideas would come as they had come before, and he would set them down.

The real and the ideal stood very closely side by side on that fanciful page of his life. Norris sat down to write. Quietness reigned. Then came a telegram from his lawyers calling him to Liverpool. Hot foot he travelled thither; came back and sat down again. He wrote for an hour. Tea intervened: a cup arrived at the study door, he drank it and set to work again. The germ had got itself shaped in his brain. Notes flowed from his pen: names, characters, characteristics, environment—the thing was growing, leaping for birth; then came the clamour of a gong, and Norris looked up to find it dinner-time and to acknowledge that he was tired.

At ten o'clock next day he returned to his den and commenced once more. This novel he had planned and watched expand should be the magnum opus of his life. Tenderness, humanity, style, atmosphere—it should be complete, a masterpiece for all time, a book for people to dream over when he was gone; . . . then down the drive in full view of his window came again that torturing uniform on a scarlet bicycle, trapesing to interrupt him.

The man was enmeshed in work, the outcome directly of that riotous night at the edge of the banks, indirectly of the more subtle and remote troubles to which even the strongest of us is bound by heredity.

And so it went on. Daily he set to work, and almost daily he received letters and telegrams calling him to the greater city across the water. After a while he began to expect these summons, and instead of going to his room he prowled the garden, visited the greenhouses, examined the apparatus, got smutty dabbling with the fires and

came in. To-morrow he would work. But to-morrow brought more documents and Liverpool claimed the day, the week went by, the month—and not a line of that masterpiece had been written in the study, so jealously barred from the household.

At first this passed without comment; but as time went on it began to make its presence felt. The tension, the constant interruption, the devouring stream of documents, all took him more strongly in hand, and nature flagged under the double strain. It was unendurable. Ethel, Helen, and the children all saw it, but Norris held resolutely to his theory, "one has but to sit down and think and something comes." That was a theory born in a quiet cabin in the old *Coorong*, with the pure fresh dawn looking in at the open ports, the ripple of the sea jingling in ears that had learned to know each note of the score it played. Now—well, Norris came to his room and sat thinking—Harrod had written again demanding an interview, and presently the officers, the streets, the trams, cabs, and clerks would occupy his leisure.

Harrod was Norris's lawyer, a personal friend, and one of the kindest of good fellows, who, when the matter of the alteration of course came up, decided at once—brusque, gruff, pursing his lips—"That mustn't appear. Never do. Suicide." And again, when Norris with shame and blinding humiliation explained that he and Flynn had jumped at the first shock—"Chut-chut! hum . . . er . . . no, that must not come in. Damaging, . . . future ruined if that gets wind. . . . Flynn, Flynn—who is 'Flynn?'" Norris explained. "Ha! where is he, . . . any notion? New York, eh! Well—long may he stay there."

In this fashion it went on. The dreary and interminable papers; the stolid and truculent witnesses; the blunders in diction, the blunders in phrasing, the missing note here, the complete explanation there—and after it all the streets, cold, raw, full of the latent hostility of English winter; the sudden changes, hot to-day, to-morrow—rain, sleet, hail, snow, all within one

gorgeous and soul-inspiring twenty-four hours ; again, to a man newly home from the tropics and white suits, the position spelled doctors.

But Norris saw no doctor, had no time or thought of self or his ailments at this juncture, and kept them zealously under key. Somewhere within him factions were disputing this absurdity. Somewhere amidst the delicate organism that goes to make man, cords were complaining, nerves crying out, brain growing restive,—all to no purpose. The work had to be done. The novel must get itself written—else, presently, when difficulties foreshadowed by Harrod came, there would be no bread in the cupboard of Norris's buying—and that, certainly, must be anathema to all men. So he decided it, standing balancing events in the study. Not yet, however, were these two things licked into shape. Not to-morrow, nor a month hence, would the case be in order alone—and when that happy consummation had been reached, then, even at the last moment, some side issue might intervene and unbalance the work from the beginning.

It takes a lifetime to become innured to toil amidst the roar of a great city, to grow hardened to the methods adopted by business men seeking quick roads to wealth, and the sailor has scant reverence for any of it. It belongs so entirely to the world of jostle and shuffle and push, that it is scarcely in line with a sailor's more direct method. Men do not say in precise terms the thing they mean—they walk round it, to consider the result before speaking. They have but a poor opinion of sailors, and to balance matters, sailors dub them "touts and runners." It is all anathema to the man straight from the wind-swept seas, and anathema it will remain in spite of steam and the rush of modern greyhounds.

Often, as on this evening, Norris came home ready for nothing but sleep ; tired, abject—a shuttle from which all the thread has been drawn. He came home, met Ethel, read the signals and passed to his room deciding that he had gauged her aright. His wife was coming to despise him openly. She no longer met him at the door or accompanied him thither in the morning. She would

have reigned happily radiant with a man whose income grew with his years, who was voraciously successful. Norris was not of this breed. His income grew less, success scarcely harassed him, and, in addition, had he not played the coward and would he not assuredly suffer? Nothing he could do would prevent that. Even if that book of his, about which they took such an abominable time, proved a success, of what avail, he asked of the four walls that hemmed him, were words, scenes, pictures, with a woman who worshipped muscle and had for her heroes great fighters, great soldiers, great sailors? Still, there was a chance. He caught at it greedily, held it in hand, and sat down to work. Chance!

From the confines of the room came a voice saying distinctly, "There is no such thing as chance."

The days passed, and over him as he moved to and fro the river and city ways lay the stifling grey sky, the reeking grey smoke, the throb and hum of a hive engrossed in toil unweary of money-spinning, unweary of money-spending—the lost more lost as the days grew colder, the ragged more noticeably ragged, the hopeless shorn even of the sunshine, hedged by misery and waiting for to-morrow.

Always they wait for to-morrow, these people, and Norris, in a sense, was of them. To-morrow would put new strength into the novel; to-morrow might bring word of that dallying MS. of his; to-morrow might perchance see the end of entanglement,—but the day came and went, leaving no mark, no relief, each twenty-four hours a trifle more arid than its predecessor.

So Christmas passed and the New Year came, and with them entered the boisterous jar of conflict, the increasing sense of danger—until one day late in January there arrived with the morning's letters a heavy package from that street abutting on the Strand, and Norris ate no breakfast.

He moved upstairs and sat down to read his letters—the letter sent with that bulky package. It was a grey day. The wind sobbed amidst the stripped trees and swept about the angles, carrying a hint of coming snow grey day. A day to remember. One of the mile-

stones beside which a man droops on his way through life.

Was it worth while examining that package? Norris knew what were its contents. For some reason, the MS. had come back—perhaps to be altered, . . . perhaps with a suggestion, . . . perhaps . . . Pish! He cut the string and sat down with the thing naked in his lap and saw, balanced squarely in the middle of the string which held it together, an envelope addressed to Capt. Norris. A type-written letter.

There is no friendliness in a type-written letter. No sympathy. It is cold, heartless, a document shorn of all the attributes of humanity. Norris decided the point as he tore the wrap and held the thing to read,—

“DEAR SIR,—We regret very much to be compelled to decline the kind offer you make us: but our reader’s report does not warrant our undertaking its publication, and we therefore reluctantly return the MS. Will you please notify us of its safe arrival in due course, and oblige. Faithfully yours, SHACKLETON & Co.”

Well, there it stood at all events, eminently cold, eminently business-like, and already burning deep into the heart of this man who had waited with so much certitude.

What did it mean? Shackleton & Co. had published his first book, and had been liberal in their praises of its literary qualities—what then did it mean? A telegram could bring no worthy explanation; the telephone was too inaccessible; nothing but a letter would serve him at this juncture, and so, at once, Norris sat down to ask, shortly, and without comment, the question on paper. Then he stamped it, went out and posted it. A man must do something at such a crisis, so Norris walked.

It was a grey day. Small, crisp flakelets struggled earthward from the leaden skies. Far off in the valley the shipping hooted and brayed of the difficulty it found in the channels. A grey day: fit environment for grey thoughts, fit moment for the rejection of a book which

was to outshine that other of which men had spoken in terms of praise.

Norris returned to his room, and opening a drawer of his bureau, hid the tell-tale package from sight. Buried it, pending an answer to that letter he had sent on its travels, and again went out. Liverpool claimed him. The landing-stage is a promenade where men may walk and seek oblivion. Norris walked there, wrapped in the grey-ness.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A PASSENGER FROM THE STATES.

Liverpool. Three o'clock, and the landing-stage barricaded to welcome the arrival of a liner from New York.

A cold winter's afternoon, with the sun sinking red behind the purple chimneys and warehouses surrounding the great float; a splash of light winking blood-red in the river, and a mass of purple cloud fantastically threatening the Cheshire city. The wind struck chill, and the police at the barrier looked more monstrous than ever as they stood beating hands and passing ticket-holders up the stage. A dense crowd stood grouped about the barrier, showing anæmic faces, famine-pinched faces, bloated faces, consumptive faces—the disfigured faces of the unwanted “tenth”—that move always to the front of events in cities—waiting, watchful, jocular, hungry.

Children were there, jostling at their mother's knees and clamouring to see; babies in arms; men with dingy mufflers twined round necks innocent of collar; thin, wiry Lascars, bulkily clad as to body and walking airily on pipe-stem legs; fat women of the slums, with porters' knots for hats, and the attitude learned by perpetually balancing weights—thick, waistless personages these, with lined faces and drawn eyes; slim, shawled vixens, and



barelegged Arabs touting matches and the latest evening liar,—all mercifully buoyant in spite of the cold.

A deep, booming roar sounded from the dim Reach, where the blood danced amidst the ripples, and the crowd at the barrier surged forward with one aim. "That's 'er," a voice announced in a passionless bass.

"Yah!" said another, but with no intention of sneering; "got 'is lights 'ung out a'ready, too."

The man drew back his lips as though he pointed to something edible. The crowd craned necks to see, shuffling softly with their feet.

"Love us!" said another, as the ship crept steadily nearer, "there's not much chanct fer anyfing uz falls acrost 'er bow—that's a moral."

"You're right."

"She'd go froo a bloomin' 'aystack," the first emphasised.

"Yah!" his friend chimed in, "she's meant to. I've stoked 'er. . . . I were stokin' 'er w'en she walked through the *Coo-wrong*. Full speed we were goin'. Black as yer 'at. I know."

"A course," the other conceded, blandly indulgent. "A man uz is kep back fer evidence must know. The *Coo-wrong* wants it—every 'aporth."

"Full speed 's the word," the stoker resumed with a note of pride, "w'en we drop the pilot—an', 'it or miss, full speed 's the word till the tender 's 'longside at Queenstown."

"An' gen'rally it's 'it," he continued, as no one protested; "an' 'im as is 'it, . . . well, there—piff! 'e ain't there. That's all about it."

"A course 'e ain't, . . . would you be there if so be you're 'it by that bow?" a realist put in.

"Garn! Give us some parsley," said the stoker.

Apparently this clinched the matter, for those who stood sucking pipes in the immediate neighbourhood allowed a smile to break the silence which ensued, and in the midst of it the stoker, visibly nonchalant, struck a match and relighted his pipe.

He stood puffed with pride at his new importance.

Within the barrier other persons hazarded similar opinions, but in a different language. They also desired to know how much longer the *Sentinel* would take crawling up to the stage. They decided that it would soon be dark,\* and that if it was dark there would be no opportunity of seeing Mr M'Gee and his wife.

The majority of those assembled this evening on the landing-stage had come with a purpose, and the suggestion that the ship had been detained by fog in Channel did not appeal to them. Those outside were still interested in the fact that the *Sentinel* had sunk the *Coorong* in four minutes, and would not get away without something being said. Those inside had, for the most part, come to see the *Sentinel* disgorge herself of a millionaire.

Now M'Gee was the millionaire whose wife had befriended the Norrises on their enforced trip to New York, and he was returning, heralded by a chorus of pats, to take up residence in his Cheshire seat. This was the tenth trip Mr M'Gee had made in the *Sentinel*; and he allowed it to be understood, through the medium of one of his secretaries, that he considered the *Sentinel* a safe ship.

Thus, heralded by a foreword, Mr M'Gee came back to the land of his birth, and crowds flocked to the landing-stage to see him pass to the riverside station. It is not every day we can stand on the plank trodden by a millionaire; nor is it every day we can watch the fat wielder of millions take his seat in a train surrounded by what the local papers call "his *entourage*."

Still, there were a few among those who waited patiently within the barrier who had no thought of M'Gee. Mrs Norris and her cousin were of this number, so also were the friends and relatives of the officers; but for the rest the millionaire claimed the multitude.

The *Sentinel* crept up the darkening Reach, held out a hand to a fussy tug snorting and twirling beneath her bow, acknowledged the offer of another on the quarter, and with their aid got herself solidly to the stage. Here she leaned like a giant, panting and ablaze with lights while steel ropes were passed to hold her.

Night had nearly come. A gleam of dusky red still lay in the sky beneath the towering clouds, but the Mersey refused to notice it. The great river had gone to sleep. It ran gurgling seaward with a cloak upon its face, and in place of the moving ships, jutting piers, and tall houses, the nightly mist lay pricked with gleaming points of fire, all dimly reflected on the inky surface.

Except for the one hoarse note given far down the Reach, the vessel had made no sound. Silently, like a leviathan of the deep, she stole up between the banks, gathered aid, and came to rest. With the dexterity acquired by long practice, without fuss or shouting her crew had brought her again safely over the seas, up the Channel lanes, down the bridle-paths outside the bar, and tied her securely to the stage.

The lights on that great promenade for weary citizens in search of freshness looked up now at companion lights, and winked approval in the frosty air.

"Gangways there!"

Some one high up amidst the blare of lamps gave utterance to the desire, and immediately a wire, having at the end of it a hook, descended out of space. Some of those whose business it had been to help pass moorings sprang forward, and in a minute the bridges were climbing into position.

Again some one shouted. "All fast," he said. "Come along, those who want."

This might have been taken by the multitude outside the barrier as a generous invitation from the wealthy to the poor; but the bo'sun, who spoke, merely pointed to the fact that those who held passes would be permitted to ascend.

Among the first to take advantage of the offer were Mrs Norris and her cousin—two, at all events, of those who had not come to see M'Gee. They were not interested in millionaires; they were interested in the *Sentinel's* captain, —Dick, as they called him in the sanctity of confidential utterance,—and they had come in response to Callaghan's message, sent from Queenstown, asking Norris and his wife to meet him.

The two girls, marshalled by a quartermaster, ascended at once to the promenade, and the commander was found.

"Delighted to see you, Mrs Norris," he cried, advancing with outstretched hands, "and Miss Douglas too. Really, it is very good of you—at such an hour, and in this bitter weather!"

They replied laughing that the weather was magnificent, and the ship, as usual, a mine of wonder demanding exploration at the hands of neophytes. "But," Ethel added, "at the last moment Arthur refused to accompany me, and so I brought Helen."

Callaghan looked up quickly. "How is he?" he questioned.

"Rather glum, I'm afraid."

"The case, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Any trouble, Mrs Norris—anything new?"

"No—but he can't shake it off. He is firmly convinced that he is ruined."

Callaghan's lips fell into line. "My fault," he exclaimed. "Jove! I wonder you care to speak to me, seeing what I have done for you all."

"It might have happened with any one in command," said Ethel, with decision. "You are not to blame."

"You are very kind," Callaghan protested.

"No—but I wish to be just; and, until the matter is decided, the less we say of blame the better," she replied swiftly. "Besides, on consideration, I don't think that is the sole cause of Arthur's trouble. . . . You see," she added, after a moment's hesitation, "he writes."

"Writes—what, books? How delightful!"

"One," Ethel admonished him, smiling at his eagerness. "And it was awfully well reviewed, too."

"Gad! And I thought I knew him," Callaghan exclaimed. "What is it about?"

"The sea."

"Nautical—eh? Good,—I must congratulate him. Did it bring any success?"

"Only from the reviewers. He had some wonderful letters. But there, as far as I understand it, it ends."

Callaghan was not versed in these matters. It seemed to him that if a book were well spoken of by the critics, success must follow. He said so in terms which admitted of no equivocation.

"Just my notion," Ethel laughed. "Helen and I argue the question at length, but we get no forarder."

"No, and never will," Helen decided, "until you recognise that what the Public wants is melodrama and not art. Arthur's book is too good to be popular. The multitude aren't educated up to it—and I rather doubt if they ever will be."

"Rather rough on Arthur," Callaghan remarked.

"It's pretty rough on any one who happens to be an artist either in words, or paint, or music; for, you may depend upon it, the artist will never play down to the B. P.—simply because he can't. He knows they want stories, tunes—the kind of things they can understand without bother; but he can't build them. He is the wrong type. To be a successful novelist or a successful musician you must be a business man, and level-headed. Arthur is not level-headed. He is an artist."

"Is he writing now?" Callaghan asked, uncertain how to take this rather scathing denunciation from lips so smiling.

"I expect so—sure, in fact. But you mustn't allude to it. It is secret—inviolable."

"Why?"

Ethel shrugged her shoulders.

"I can't for the life of me see why, either?"

"Because you won't," Helen laughed. "Now, own up. Aren't you just as proud of those reviews as I am, . . . aren't you? Come. Truth."

"Perhaps I am—prouder in fact. But that isn't the point. If I found I could write but that the public wouldn't buy my books because they were over their heads, I should write down to their level."

"Then you would be a business woman and not a novelist."

"Well—and why not, pray? Don't I want the pennies, and doesn't Arthur?"

They moved away from the rail laughing, and came to

the drawing-room ports, where Ethel halted to peep. "Just so," said Callaghan, "books or no books, you must take your last look at the *Sentinel* to-night—at all events with me."

Ethel glanced up quickly. "Are you leaving, then?" she asked.

"I must. The case comes on in a fortnight, perhaps earlier;—but," he went on, hurriedly changing the theme, "I wished you and Arthur to come down, not to discuss past troubles, but to put you in touch with Colonel Marchmont, who, you recollect, was one of my passengers on that trip of yours to New York."

"Yes, I remember," Ethel flashed.

"He is M'Gee's brother-in-law, the millionaire who travels with an *entourage*, you know," — Callaghan laughed; "and as he seemed very keen on the subject of our mishap, and has taken a great liking to Arthur —and, if I may say so, to *you*, Mrs Norris, I agreed to bring you down to meet him. But now," he added questioningly, "I scarcely know what to do, . . . what do you suggest?"

"Oh! meet him, of course. Why not?"

"Precisely. I see no reason. Indeed, I am rather fond of Marchmont, and as things have fallen out, Arthur would do well to cultivate him. He is a big-wig," he expatiated, "J.P., and several other things, has a place across the water, owns motors, horses, carriages, . . . and besides, there's M'Gee the shipowner and business magnate generally, a man who can pull all the strings if he likes; . . . er . . . the fact is, I fancied they might be useful to Arthur, you know."

"We will see him, by all means—won't we, Helen?"

"Rather. I love motors," said Helen, from the recesses of her fur coat.

"And Marchmont loves music and painting. You still paint, Miss Douglas?"

"Course. Delightful man!" quoth Helen, "but does that mean he can . . .?" she made the motion of one playing the piano.

"No; violin."

"Beautifuller and beautifuller!"

"You'll have to get him to obligato your songs, dear," Helen purred, with a mischievous twinkle; "then if we get stoney, you know . . ."

"Be quiet," Ethel returned, suddenly grave.

"I don't think I merited that snub?" said Helen, her eyes resting appealingly for a moment on Callaghan's clean cut face. "I said we—by which I mean me, always. And as my pictures won't get themselves hung, and dealers don't think it worth while to make a corner in me, . . . why, there you are, you see."

They all laughed, and Ethel turned to the commander.

"Yes," she said, "we will see this fairy prince of yours—who knows, perhaps he will bring us luck."

And as they crossed the promenade to find it, a round of cheering rose upon the night and brought the girls to a standstill.

"M'Gee leaving—he has tipped all hands," Callaghan explained, as they passed to the rail. "How the crowd loves a Personage. Some day that type will be king, and then . . ."

"Poor England!" Helen apostrophised; then, her artistic soul in arms, "Oh! what a picture that would make. Dives and the crowd. A modern Dives and a modern crowd—hungry, unwashed, ragged, blue,—ready to fly at each other's throats for the favour of the great man."

Callaghan turned to look at her, noting her earnest gaze, her wrapt attitude. "Paint it," he said.

"Can't," she replied, climbing down. "I can only see."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE WRITER-MAN.

Arthur Norris sat in an easy-chair before the drawing-room fire. He had finished dinner, eaten in company with Claire and Jacky, and now the children were in bed

and he was at leisure to sit and brood, to read or think or do any of those things an active man delights in when opportunity occurs. Apparently, however, Ethel's diagnosis was correct. The paper lay folded on his knees. His hands were clasped behind his head. He stared into the fire.

For perhaps an hour he had remained thus, and at the end of it a small contraction of the brow was noticeable. He moved slightly, glanced at the clock, and said, under his breath, "Jove! it's a pity I didn't go. . . ." Then again, after a lengthy silence, "Cha! they ought to be in. There is no sense in this eternal gadding."

He released his hands and sat with poised finger-tips staring at the glowing embers. For perhaps the fiftieth time he passed certain figures in mental array: "One hundred and fifty of mine, one hundred and twenty-five Ethel's, one hundred and seventy-five Helen's—total, four hundred and fifty. In these days a bagatelle for two, and here are five in addition to the servants." Again, "There is Helen's share. She may marry—and in any case, now my pay is gone, we are dependent on her contribution."

A silver chime in the hall outside heralded the stroke of time, and Norris, counting the deeper notes, discovered it was nine o'clock—nine, and still his wife and Helen had not returned.

Again there appeared the wrinkling of the brow, the half petulant move, the crossing of one leg over the other, a jerkily dancing foot pointing fireward; and again it passed, leaving the man still gazing, still balancing events—ways and means.

He had ceased writing long since, and now lived only for the answer to that letter he had written. For some reason it was delayed; but the novel had been returned, slammed in his face contemptuously, as it appeared. Well, and if they chose to add insult to insult, they had better keep their letter unwritten. It mattered nothing. No; he had ceased writing now. The worry entailed by his case was sufficient to break the determination of a stronger man than Norris. Write? Gadzooks! he was unable to



pen two sentences without tearing as many pages,—he who had sat with such ease in the *Coorong's* cabin and jotted down delicate pictures of the sea. These pictures the critics had mouthed over, triumphant. They had each and all of them something to say of this man's amazing touch, of his dexterity of phrase, his strength and virility. Essays, word-pictures, virile touch,—all were gone. There was no time here for word-painting, no leisure, no peace: none of the essential restfulness of the life that had been his. Trust in self, too, became daily less abundant; and in its place came the subtle irritation caused by the knowledge of his lapse: of the fact that men looked askance at him and spoke sneeringly when he passed.

"Nicky ran," say the Russians of their Czar, remembering a certain reported episode of his in Japan; and so in Norris's ears the phrase rang, too—"Norris jumped." Even Harrod, kind old friend as he was, suffered under the knowledge.

No one could write in such circumstances. Least of all, perhaps, Norris the visionary, the dreamer, a man of moods, versatile, and on the borderland of attainment. And so, after days of work—days of agony and mental torture, dragging at the threads of sentences, searching for the essential word—days when his brain teemed with ideas, all mixed up and irretrievably entangled with the questions of law and fact, he came to sit at length before the fire, or to pace the room violently seeking refuge from the curse he endured, and thrust paper, pens, and ink to the furthestmost limit of his life. He could not write. He forgot that he had ever written. He was face to face with the meanest conceivable episode of a man's career, and must think. It was his necessity.

And now as he leaned there before the fire balancing figures, he told himself that if he came out scatheless there would be no need for anxiety, no need to worry further about that shadow-land of literary affairs he had striven to enter. He would allow the thing to shape itself, if need be, and get into steam: take service in one of the Atlantic liners as Callaghan had done and climb to com-

mand. But there should be no more sailing-ship adventures. The day for that had passed. He was becoming old—old and stiff. Sailing-ships in these days require youngsters to work them—"Dutchmen," for preference: men who do not stick at snubs, object to Dago crews, worry about delays, or, he added, vengefully reminiscent, mind starvation pay.

Norris leaned back watching the ebb and flow of fire-light, noting the changing features, the capes and islands, the faces which melted and were lost in the advancing red ruin—then suddenly sprang alert, staring towards the shuttered windows.

The hoot of a motor car sounded close at hand; the squelch of rubber-tyres running on gravel became distinct beneath, then ceased, and the hall-bell clanged.

Norris fell back once more in his chair, wondering indolently who came, and anathematising the state which permitted him to start at the sound of a horn, the bray of an absurd motor.

In a minute the door opened and Ethel, radiant after her drive in the frosty night, looked in, crying, "Arthur! Come out, there's a dear boy. Here is Colonel Marchmont, and he won't come in."

Norris's face drew the lines of annoyance,—"Marchmont?" he questioned.

"Yes, Mrs M'Gee's brother. You remember, on the *Sentinel*?"

"I don't know him?"

"Yes, you do. He was awfully kind to us and to the kinders—come and see him."

"You forget," he said a trifle stiffly, "I was laid up all the trip—I scarcely saw a soul."

"But I did, . . . and . . ."

"I don't doubt it, Ethel."

"Oh, don't be a brute," she flashed, then in an instant was at his side, looking up, pleading, "Dearest! I didn't mean that. It slipped. You are my own ownest what has had a very bad time, and can't frow it off—come!" she kissed him on the lips, reaching up and fondling him like a child. "Come, he's been awful kind to me and

Helen; and Dick—yes, I will call him Dick—wanted to bring you and him together; then, as you didn't come, he got him to bring us home, and I made him call because . . . oh, because he's a J.P., and a big-wig, and may do lots for us if he likes, . . . and we may want him, you know—and . . . yes, you will come? There, you're laughing at last—a tiny, weeny laugh—because its wiffee came to it and shook away its blues and made it forget what it had said—come . . .”

She broke off breathless and bewitchingly enticing as Norris rose, and putting his arm about her moved to the door.

“Yes,” he said, “you are right. I was a brute.”

“You are my husband!” she threatened, finger in air, “don't you dare.”

The trouble had passed. They made their exit with linked arms.

Helen Douglas, with Marchmont following closely, was in the hall when the two came out. Marchmont, wearing an eyeglass and clad in a heavy fur coat, advanced immediately, holding out his hand,—“Glad to see you, Captain Norris,” he said; “must apologise for bothering you at such an hour—by Jove, though, you have some fine old oak here. Pardon the criticism, but really there is oak and oak, you know, and this happens to be the right thing.”

“As far as my memory serves, it is just over three hundred years old,” said Norris. “Do you admire that sort of thing?”

“Rather. Wish I could transport it to my place out there,” he jerked his thumb to indicate the Dee valley.

“My husband's great-great-grandfather put it up—how many times great, Arthur?” Mrs Norris flashed. “And it is not for sale,” she added with a laugh.

“No, but it may be,” said her husband with a sudden twinge.

“Arthur!”

“Ethel!”

Marchmont glanced from one to the other, and seeing laughter in the eyes, at all events of one, passed over the

momentary lapse. "Very well," he said, "it's a bargain. When you want to part, come to me."

Mrs Norris led the way to the drawing-room where the chair pointed conclusively to her husband's occupation. "He was so comfortable and dreamy, you have no idea," she remarked.

"You'll think me no end of a nuisance," Marchmont objected, "taking you out of yourself in this way. Fact is, Callaghan rather expected you over this evening, and as you didn't turn up and he couldn't get away, he thought you wouldn't mind if I looked you up solo."

"Then, as it happened," Ethel suggested, as he paused uncertain, "we two got jammed at Woodside, not a cab for love or money and the trams crowded, so Colonel Marchmont persuaded us to join him and we fell."

"Naturally," said Helen, "seeing the car had seats and we were dead beat."

"This comes of my allowing you to go ship-worshipping without me," Norris laughed a little grimly.

"And the end of it is that I want you all to come over to the Manor to-morrow evening," Marchmont put in. "Dine at eight—have some music, . . . bachelor establishment, early hours, motor both ways, . . . eh, what d'you say? Oh, and yes, Callaghan will be there."

Norris looked at his wife. "Well, dear, what do you say?" he questioned, "and you, Helen? As far as I am concerned I shall be delighted, but I am in their hands, Colonel—they must decide."

"Couldn't be in better," the Colonel announced briskly. "Come, ladies, we look for your decision."

"Delighted, sir," she said, "Ethel paraphrased, with a fascinating bow."

"Charmed," said Helen, with eyes that looked far, far into the depths of the fire, "especially as you offer us that lovely motor ride."

"Then it's a bargain, eh, Norris? Mind I shall expect you—and the machine will be here at six-thirty with Callaghan on board. Now, good-night; sorry to have bothered you at such an hour. Bring your sketch-book with you, Miss Douglas, and . . . er . . . I wonder

whether you would mind bringing some songs, Mrs Norris?"

"If you wish it, I will gladly."

"That is good of you. Norris," he continued, moving towards the door; "music is the breath of life to me. Without music I should die. Your wife has a marvellous voice, . . . *au revoir*, to-morrow night, then!"

He climbed up beside the chaffeur, waved his cap, and the motor coughed down the drive.

The others returned to the drawing-room and drew chairs close to the fire.

"How did he know you could sing?" Arthur questioned moodily, now they were alone.

"Because I sang to him on the *Sentinel*, I spec'," Ethel laughed.

They sat in silence. Somehow the note jarred. Norris poked the fire with unnecessary violence, then leaned back and stared.

"I think it's most awfully kind of Colonel Marchmont," Ethel remarked, striving to fill the gap. "A most friendly act," she added, as no one answered. She unpinned her hat and placed it on her knees. Norris maintained silence.

"Me too," Helen announced, slipping off her coat and settling comfortably, feet on fender. "And isn't this jolly, Arthur?"

"It depends," said Norris, evading the question of cosiness, "on what lies behind. A man gives nothing for nothing in these days."

"Now that's cynical and horrid," Ethel broke in impetuously. "I hate to hear you in that vein. Really, Arthur, one would imagine you were a hundred instead of thirty, . . . thirty, what is it?"

"If it is necessary to be a hundred before I can see things as they are, then I am a hundred," he returned dejectedly. "But I don't think it is necessary—therefore . . ."

"Oh! spare us the corollary. A blind person could see it," Ethel laughed, vainly struggling to speak lightly. Then, as her husband made no response, and still striving

to hide the jar, she turned to her cousin. "What do you think, Helen—is it fair comment?"

"About as fair as the comment I get on my pictures," she returned, "and from that point of view everything is fair."

"Yes, but is it?"

"It's an impressionist study in black and white," said Helen evasively.

"Therefore untrue to life?"

"I didn't say so."

"No—but the critics do."

"Some of them."

"Precisely—those who are a hundred, who have dyspepsia and brain fag, and are failures. Arthur is not a failure, and he isn't a hundred—at least, if he is, I have scarcely had time to discover it."

Norris moved uneasily in his chair and the foot balanced against the red glow of the fire showed signs of agitation,

"There was a day," he said slowly, "when my opinion was considered of value—when, if I made a statement, that statement was allowed to be of some weight, but now, . . . oh well, let it pass—let it pass. I don't know that it is necessary to argue or analyse the matter further. Nothing is worth argument. The main point is that we still live."

"Bluer and bluer," said Ethel, half-smiling in spite of the tone.

"No, dear—not bluer and bluer. I wish you wouldn't suggest the thing so often."

"I thought it was you who suggested it, Arthur."

"And in that case you are unwise to remind me of it."

There was silence between the two after this. The foot still beat time nervously before the fire. Ethel, flushed and serious, took up her hat and held it towards her husband.

"And I've just bought this and tried to do my best to look pretty and bewitching, and all the rest of it, to . . . to . . . make things easier for us, and you have never told me you like it," she concluded, the words rushing forth pell-mell to cloak her tears.

Norris stared into the fire. The question of a hat failed to interest him. He was engrossed with himself, his shortcomings, and morbidly alive to snubs.

Helen rose, and gathering her coat close to her face, looked at her watch. "It's eleven o'clock," she said, "and I'm awful seepy—night-night you two."

She moved to the door and let herself out, and immediately Ethel passed over and kneeled beside her husband. "What is it, Arthur?" she questioned, wide-eyed, pleading, "what have I done?"

"Done? . . . Nothing."

This was so obviously an evasion that she countered with—"Then, why are you cross with me?"

"I am not cross. I am worried, . . . worried."

"No," she decided, firmly, setting this shibboleth aside, "you have said that before, and I have seen you worried before. Now you are cross—and with me."

No answer.

"Tell me," she begged, her arms going up about his neck.

"There is nothing to tell—don't fidget me."

She refused to be angry and did not move. "Dearest, look at me," she begged.

He half turned and caught her glance, but there was no response in his eyes, no answering note—the look of a man in whom love is dead. She withdrew one hand to hide her face, shuddering.

"No, no—not like that, . . . not like that!" she whispered. Then again, after a pause, "Arthur, tell me what it is that I have done."

He moved slightly in the chair, drawing away from her, and she sprang back, quick now to take the hint, her eyes gleaming, bright with tears. He made no effort to restrain her.

"You tell me," she said, "that once I took your opinion unchallenged—that I accepted all your doctrines. I might with equal point retort that once I could not have kneeled beside you nor put my arms about you without some response—but you no longer care for my caresses, they appear to bore you—well, I suppose I am getting old.

One soon ages, you know. Seven years of married life should be sufficient to knock all the romance out of a woman—even if she begins at eighteen, as I did. You see," she laughed, a trifle strainedly as he maintained silence, "I, too, am getting cynical. Soon I shall be able to say things as neatly as . . . as any one, and then we shall . . ."

"Ethel!"

"I mean it, Arthur. I mean every word."

"Wait."

"At my lord's service," she returned with a gesture of mock humility.

"I think you are forgetting yourself," he said sternly, but without heat.

"I thought we decided it was you who had done the forgetting," she flashed. "Arthur! tell me what it is I have done. It isn't fair to leave me in doubt. Is it because we went down to the stage?"

"No—why should I object?"

"Why shouldn't you—if you do?"

"I don't."

Ethel cast about her again and said—"Is it because we dined on the *Sentinel*?"

"I wish to God you had never seen the *Sentinel*," he groaned.

"Why?"

"Can you ask me?"

"Then that isn't it?"

"No."

"Is it because of Colonel Marchmont?" she questioned with a new inspiration.

"Marchmont? No—why?"

"Then it's nothing," she laughed, "and my lord is cross with me for nothing—which being absurd I refuse to believe."

"Ethel!" he broke out, "that is not true, and you know it. I am not cross as you term it—I am worried, anxious, tired if you wish. The future hangs over me like a cloud. I can see nothing to laugh at or to be jocular about. I remember we are not alone in the world, that there are two small children to bring up—somehow. And I re-



collect that I . . . I . . .”—he halted, searching for words, his face flushed, his lips trembling,—“that I am not as strong as I was—no, it’s nothing,” he went on, raising one hand as if to restrain her, “nothing serious at all events, . . . I am older than I was, . . . and not so strong by . . . and if you turn on me . . . I . . .”

“I turn?” she questioned, amazed.

He shook his head. He tried to respond, but words failed him. Then he took a deep breath, and passing his hands vaguely down his face, said brokenly—“Oh—damn it all, . . . can’t you see?” and suddenly leaning forward broke into tears.

Ethel, white to the tips of her ears now, crept close and drew his head to her breast. She said nothing, but fondled him as she would have fondled Jacky or Claire. He did not resent the action. Indeed it appeared to soothe him. In a very little while he had regained control, and Ethel drew him closer, whispering—“I shall never turn on you, dearest—never, . . . while you . . .” then she paused.

Tears welled in her eyes, but she kept herself rigidly against breakdown, and continued to pass her fingers lightly through his hair. •

The unfinished sentence should have told him of the longing that was upon her, the intonation, the break in her voice; but he saw only himself, the humiliation she had witnessed—recollected his cowardice, his desertion of her, and decided that this, too, would presently be part of her equipment, should she desire to sting. In his eyes the position was fraught with peril only for him. The incidents relative to the loss of the *Coorong*, his actions, his cowardice, stood over him like a nightmare. Nothing he could say or do would ever alter that. The thought annoyed him. He turned somewhat roughly in his seat, and said—

“There—now, I’ve made a bally <sup>o</sup> ass of myself, perhaps you are satisfied.”

It was the last word for insult. Ethel rose from her knees and went to her room. •

From far down the valley came the dull boom of a train hurrying people to their homes on Deeside.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## IF THIS BE LOVE.

For nearly three months affairs had continued on these disastrous lines, and as nothing in nature stands still, it is apparent they had either grown better or worse during that interval.

In the beginning the Angel of the *Coorong* was the Angel of the cottage, and if Norris were more than usually despondent she struck a balance by being more than usually forgiving,—more than usually bright and winning. " But as Christmas passed and the new year dawned on a country and town sodden with weeks of rain and mist, and Arthur grew still more bearish in his demeanour, the brightness vanished, and instead of soft answers came sometimes those sharp responses of a woman cut to the quick by the persistent snubbing, the persistent cynicism of him she loves.

On one or two occasions lately there had been scenes which had bid fair to destroy all chance of future happiness—then to Ethel had come the memory of her husband's suffering, of the blight that had fallen upon his life, and she coaxed and wheedled him into something approaching gaiety. But it is not possible for ever to play on one string without prejudicing its endurance, nor is it possible always to command sympathy when proffered sympathy visibly produces no return.

And so, on this night, when it seemed they had gained a friend who might perchance be willing to help, if that blow her husband dreaded actually fell, she found the tension still more tightly drawn, the possibility of reconciliation more remote than before.

Arthur had brought this thing about. His words, his actions, his abominable depression, his cynicism, had all become very noticeably pertinent, now her arms no longer sufficed to make him smile. They were not beggars, she decided, standing to stare across the lawn at the bare

trees, listening to the voice of the wind soughing about the house with that note of sadness which always presages a southerly gale. Even if the worst came they could "never be beggars. No, it was not that. She was growing old, wrinkled, stale. She had lost her power to please. A flush ran over her, a thrill of pain, and she approached the glass reiterating the question—old?

An oval face framed in glorious hair, copper-tinged, eyes gleaming, complexion fair—and now the brilliant colouring of the type that is said to light up at night—old? A smile, wistful, a little sad, passed over her face at the suggestion—old? As well call Jacky old. There was not a line—not one even there in the curves, at that touchstone of all women—her neck was smooth and soft as Claire's.

Figure? She stood back, tilting the long glass to see—tall, lissom, rounded—erect of carriage. Again no, it was not she who had deteriorated, grown old and brought frumpiness as a further disgrace to a husband already worried. It was something else, . . . something she could not perceive, something undeniably mysterious. A sudden thought possessed her. The hat she had bought—did it by any chance not suit her? She knew Arthur's fastidious taste in these matters, how often she had been compelled to send back creations termed triumphs of millinery skill, because he failed to appreciate their beauty, . . . well, perhaps . . .

She crossed the room, lifted the soft plumed thing from her bed, and putting it on, stood again before the glass. A graceful figure clad in sheeny green, a fluffy boa pushed back, half falling from her shoulders, and a big, drooping, tilted, pinched in, puffed out, sloping away, tipping down, dull, sheeny, cheeky, soft, black hat, widened by feathers, and set slightly over her brow, confronted her. She examined the effect with eyes grown exceedingly bright, pressed in the pins, arranged a coil of hair, and stood back—"No, no, . . . it is not the hat, . . . it is not the hat," she almost sobbed with relief; then, suddenly become desperate, crossed to her cousin's room and knocked.

"Come in—come in," sounded from within, and she entered crying—

"Helen! Helen! tell me what is wrong between us—tell me, you dear, kind, loving old dearest—or I shall . . ."

"What's wrong between who, pet—you and me? Nothing, loveliest—nothing. Couldn't be—world without end. Amen."

Helen met her with eyes that saw her trouble, recognised the pathos of it, and had no intention of admitting anything.

"That hat of yours is just a dream," she said; "it suits those dear little runaway curleques down about your ears; it brings out the strength of that red, red mouth, so shaped for kisses; it accentuates your colouring; it sits on your head like a bird on its nest. . . . Oh! if poor Frank Holl could have seen you, or Sargent, . . . or one of those big top-of-the-trees, what a picture they would have made. . . ."

"Helen!"

"No, not Helen—Ethel. 'Mrs Arthur Norris,' yes, that would have fetched the Academy. Euphonious, isn't it? Not quite so labeley as Mrs Teddy Norris, or Mrs Jacky Norris; but it would have fetched them—every one. Oh! why can't I paint. What we've missed! and all because I aren't a Frank Holl, or a Sargent, or anything. . . ."

"Helen!"

"Yes, dearest."

"I asked you a question."

"Am't I answering it, sweetheart?"

Helen, suddenly grave, came near and kissed her cousin's wife on both cheeks. "I meant to, . . ." Then after a pause, and smiling at the poor shining eyes, "Well, and need we?"

Ethel stepped a pace away.

"Am I getting old?" she demanded.

"Horrid," said her friend with vehemence.

"No—but am I?"

"It's no use telling—you wouldn't believe."

"I will—really, really . . ."

"Promise."

"I promise."

"Very well—now we'll look you over. . . . Hum! Grey-blue, Irish eyes, laughing, sunny, like the sea in summer. Complexion, fair, a trifle tanned, but smooth and soft as a powder-puff; . . . eyebrows—arched, despairingly arched; . . . lips—carmine, not quite so straight as I should like as an artist—but . . ."

"Hush, hush! I meant . . ."

"You promised," Helen warned her, shaking a finger merrily.

"Well—but . . ."

"No buts, loveliest . . ."

Ethel reached out and captured the hand, and holding it firmly, said—"No, but am I getting scraggy, and shrewish, and horrid—am I, . . . truth?"

"Scraggy, shrewish—You?"

"Well—but dearest . . ."

"Dearest doesn't respond to nonsense—why, look in the glass," she turned her to face the mirror, "curves, curves, all soft, firm curves. Aye-de-me! if I could paint—if I were Henrietta Rae or Arthur Hacker I should want you for my model. I should have a picture—a big, big monster, like Psyche at the throne of Venus, and I'd have you for the fair-haired goddess of love . . ."

"Love!" said Ethel, breaking away, and looking stonily across the room, through the wall, down the stairs, and seeing a man reclining in comfort before the fire—a man who pushed her from him, and had grown cold and heartless. "Love? There is no such thing as love."

"Now that's untrue," said Helen sturdily.

"And if there is, it doesn't last," Ethel retorted.

"And that's cynicism."

"Cynicism is only another name for philosophy," Ethel decided, plainly battling.

"And philosophy is the doctrine of resignation, sweetheart."

"I don't agree. It's the doctrine of thinking things out."

"And when you have thought things out, sweetest, what do you do? Do you alter them? Can you alter

them? Not a bit. You become resigned, and therefore . . ."

"Nonsense. I would try."

"No, you wouldn't. Why? Because you are not a locust, or a land-crab, and only locusts and land-crabs go over a wall that is in their way, and get maimed and lamed for life. You would go round. You would be resigned. The wise man and the wise woman never make exhibitions of themselves and wear out their shoes climbing walls. They go round the corner and find a little pick, and move away a stone, and then they move away another stone, and by-and-by the wall is not there, and the wise man and woman are able to walk over without having to go to the doctor to get puttied and plastered and mended."

Ethel shook her head, looking wistfully at the strength in the dark young face confronting her. "You would," she admitted, "but I, . . . I don't know. One has tried so hard—so hard, and it has done no good, and I am getting so tired of it all—that—that . . . Oh! and you have seen it too—I know, I know—and so I should like to stay here with you, and talk myself to sleep, and tell you how much I have tried, and how it is all no use, not a little, little bit of . . ." She came nearer, holding out her arms, and Helen took her to her breast, fondling the bright, waving hair.

"Dearest," she whispered. "You couldn't stay here. We are forgetting about Jacky and Claire, you know. Besides," with a swift inspiration, "don't we generally see the kinders before we go to bed?"

"May I stay here after? May I?"

Helen considered a moment, then—"Yes, if you still wish it," came from her firm lips.

They crossed the room linked at the waist,—Helen smiling, strong, clad in a dressing-gown, and her long dark hair flowing about her shoulders; Ethel reliant, trustful, still in her dinner dress, the fur about her neck, and the subtle perfume of violets advancing as she advanced, clinging to her as her gown clung, marking her as a woman to be loved and aided, not scorned and driven.

The nursery contained two cots, one on either side the window, and fronting them was a fire still red and glowing behind the high old fender. The two girls moved over and stood beside Claire—but the child was fast asleep, lying on her side, curved half way out of bed, one arm across her face—finishing a process of smotheration commenced by the pillows. Ethel lifted her gently, and put her more cosily to rest. She answered with a sigh of supreme content, unstirred, but conscious of “mummie’s” arms. “Little precious,” said Ethel kissing her. . . . “Mumsie,” said little precious in her sleep.

The sounds they had made, subdued as they were, had fallen on Jacky’s ears, and Jacky never slept until Dearmiss, as he called her, came to sing his lullaby. He demanded it now, sitting up, red of face, rough of hair, and rubbing with two small fists at eyes that would not stay open—

“Whisky-Johnny, please Dearmiss, . . . I telled Claire I wotildn’t and I wouldn’t, . . . please Whisky-Johnny.”

“Dearmiss doesn’t feel like singing to-night, sonny,” Helen pleaded, catching a glimpse of Ethel’s despair.

“Dearmiss always sings it,” Jacky announced, resolutely determined not to lie down.

Ethel made the signal of acceptance, and taking the child in her arms, held him close. “You wouldn’t bother Dearmiss,” she questioned, “if you thought she was tired?”

“Not if I fought it,” Jacky proclaimed. “Sing Dearmiss.”

Ethel had nothing to say. She leaned back against the bedpost, and as Helen crossed to look out of the window, began in her softly modulated voice to sing the old song left by Meekings as a legacy from the lost *Coorong*.

A quaint air, quaint words, quaint notion—Jacky’s one tyranny.

“Oh, whisky’s here and whisky’s there—

Whisky! Johnny!

Oh, whisky’s here and everywhere—

Whisky for my Johnny.”

The soft voice paused, and instantly Jacky prompted—

"Clothes, Dearmiss, . . . sing the clothes." The voice went on—

"Oh, whisky made me pawn my clothes—

Whisky ! Johnny !

• Oh, whisky gave me a spotted nose—

Whisky for my Johnny."

So far, courageously, with scarcely a tremor to show her pain, only a more vibrant note in the sweet young voice, a note telling of sadness; but here she paused and would have put the child to rest had he not reached out and twined his arms about her neck, saying sleepily, "Dad, Dearmiss, . . . poor ole Dad." And Dearmiss, rising to the inevitable, sang on—still more softly, still more tremulously—

"Oh, whisky killed my poor old dad—"

A pause here, and Jacky prompting—

"Whisky ! Johnny !

And whisky drove . . . my mother . . ."

Pause—comma—full stop.

Tears intervened. Tears that rolled down and would not remain under control; tears that fell on the child's face and made him look up astonished at the sudden tremor that had come to the breast on which he leaned. Then—"Oh ! Jacky, Jacky, why did you . . . ?"

And Jacky, wide awake now—

"Has any ones hurted you, Dearmiss ?"

"No, no . . . only . . ."

"Cause, if any ones has hurted you and I was a man I would knock seven bells out of him," said Jacky, red and reminiscent of the language of the *Coorong*.

"Yes, dear, but you are not a man," Helen announced, swiftly crossing to the rescue, "and if you want to help Dearmiss and fight her enemies, you must go to sleep quickly and grow strong."

She took him in her arms and Jacky subsided.

An hour later Helen left Ethel at the door of her room and returned to her own.



## CHAPTER XV.

## THE SLAMMING OF DOORS.

No—there was nothing for it. If by stretching a point Ethel could be termed flighty, then with more reason Arthur must be set down as “all nerves.” If Ethel required admiration visibly and always at the hands of mankind, then Arthur required strength, character, decision at the hands of his wife. It was the old story of magnetic influence—opposite poles attract, like poles repel. They were alike, these two. Both were fair, both sunny, both reliant, artistic—temperamentally the same. Given the conditions, it is nearly impossible to conceive another end than that with which they were confronted—these two, so fair, so young, so promisingly alive.

Arthur spent the night in the drawing-room, stirring the fire, wandering up and down the carpet, hands thrust deep in pocket, angry, unreasonable.

Again he had made an ass of himself. He announced the fact with bated breath—nothing else appealed to him. The figure he cut in the eyes of the world, or, for that matter, in the eyes of his wife, was the one thing to occupy his brain. He walked about the room deciding this business. He thought he could write, win success off-hand—as though any one had ever won success when most he wanted it—asinine! He was a fool—that he admitted. He was a coward—that he had proclaimed. He had acted this twin damnation to the life. Dressed in motley with cap and bell he could have attained no higher flight. Foolishness, cowardice! With both hands he had shovelled them forth, heaped them upon events; and now, on the one side the inevitable faced him whispering already the triumphant speeches of those who would presently judge him. “This man,” these cold-blooded gentry would pronounce, “this writer-man commanded a ship. He blundered into collision—his ship sank and some few were saved. By his orders, you will say? Not so—this man gave no

thought to the safety of others. He saved himself. He leaped at the first impact and left the rest, even his wife and children, to their fate—you see, he stands there self-condemned. A man who has written a novel dealing with tense situations, whose lips tremble. A man who should have commanded."

His wife, too, it appeared, would join the ruck of his enemies and shout of his foolishness; of how readily he could weep, how rarely he could sympathise; of how stern a creed was his preaching, how infantile and pendulous his action. She had failed to understand him when in his misery he had appealed to her and begged her to remain on his side. She did not see, could not or would not see, so he decided, the turmoil and anguish he suffered. She had left him then and gone upstairs to sleep. He could not sleep. If he lay down he would but toss and turn as he had tossed and turned for weeks without obtaining rest. Why then should he go to bed?

He gave it as his opinion, prowling restlessly up and down the carpet, marking the differences in level, where the seams came, where the pattern matched, that it would be idiocy to go to bed. He could lie on the sofa if he felt tired; he could smoke, and read, and watch the fire in any case, while upstairs there was nothing—emptiness, darkness, and the unending flights of a brain that would not rest.

A small sound on the stairs outside brought him to a standstill, and he glanced at his watch for the time. Three o'clock. The hour when once before Ethel had come down from her room clad in white and begged, twining her arms about him, that he should return to her side. He went then. He told himself, gravely hugging the words, that he had acted like a fool in obeying a woman who desired simply to sleep and could not, knowing him wakeful. He conceded so much. But he decided that if she came to-night, she would see of what kind of stuff he was made—now. He would not be cajoled.

He crossed the room and poured out a stiff glass of whisky, filled up with soda, and, lighting his pipe, sat

own to front the blaze. He sipped the liquor ostentatiously, waiting to be seen. The creaking was renewed. Footsteps moved out there on the stairs. He looked towards the door, expecting it to open; but no one came, and silence fell once more.

He rose softly from his chair and peered about. An empty staircase confronted him, an empty hall, the silence of a house wrapped in sleep—every one, apparently, was at rest; every one, as far as he could discern, had forgotten the fact of his existence. He turned to re-enter the room, and the door snapped with a clang that shook the walls. He came back to his chair and took up the glass, saying vehemently under his breath, "If I could sleep—God! if I could sleep!"

And then, as if to further torture him, came the thought that no one cared—least of all, perhaps, his wife. For, he argued, forgetful of her provocation, if she cared two split hairs would she not come down and seek to make peace before she slept? He had forgotten his determined attitude of sullen embitterment, his rejection of her advances; he had forgotten how often she had come to him only to be met by silence, indifference, and studied apathy; he had forgotten her appealing glance, the subtle efforts she made to hold him to her, her whispered prayers. He was sunk in a pit, the sides and bottom of which were sticky with wounded pride, where self-love battled with cowardice, and love, recoiling upon itself, became contempt.

Love? There was no such thing. Sympathy? It was dead, worn out, *blasé*. He had acted the coward. All the world knew it. He was sick with apprehension. The future stood before him like that book of his of which he knew every word.

The weary round of thought, reason and unreason, went on at intervals, till daylight, peeping in at the eastern window, saw him dozing restfully behind the decanters, vases, and glass; pointing to the litter of burnt matches and spilled tobacco, throwing long beams of light through the chinks of the blind, and staring at the twisting volume of blue smoke for ever rolling up and returning hearth-

ward; drew a halo about the man's head, and danced gleefully amidst the spirals. But Norris, sitting there bunched and uncomfortable before the fire, faced it now in peace. With the coming of dawn he had fallen asleep.

He woke at nine o'clock, and instantly demanded breakfast. He had business to attend in Liverpool, and blamed those sitting round the table in the dining-room for not having roused him. The thing was unheard of. He posed there as one injured. Could a man trust no one, not even his wife, to see that he did not oversleep himself? He must be at the office at ten; there was no time for a bath or a change, or anything, in point of fact. He would be compelled to go breakfastless, as it was evident he must get out of evening clothes. . . .

Helen, Ethel, and the children stared at this new phase, and Ethel touched the bell. "If you had told me, Arthur, you would have been called," she said. "I didn't know you had an appointment, and you looked as though the rest would do you good."

"You might have guessed I didn't wish to sleep till midday," he returned, and left the room with a slammed door to mark his sense of annoyance.

Ethel sat at the table unmoved. She faced the blank looks of the children, saying, "Dad has a headache, run up to the nursery like good chicks."

The chicks had finished breakfast, and now rose to accompany the nurse—Claire, solemn-eyed; Jacky, puzzled. They came to their mother for a parting hug, one on either hand; and when this had been accomplished, Jacky leaned back to look in mother's face. Said he—

"If I had a headache, I wouldn't slam doors—would you?"

"That was the wind, sonny," Ethel explained.

"D'you fink so?"

"Yes; run along and take care of Claire."

Jacky wetted the tips of his fingers and held up his and to test this problem of the air, as the *Coorong's* sailors had instructed him. He discovered none, and advertised the fact in language unmistakably nautical.

"I fink the wind 's all up and down the mast like a yard of pump-water," he remarked, "an' calms don't slam doors unless there's a swell an' the ship's rolling. We aren't rolling, are we?"

He stared through the window, watching the trees to test it, and shook his head. "No," he decided, "she isn't rolling."

Ethel administered a kiss to each in turn, and said in a new tone, "Run away, sonny; dearest is tired."

"Tired at breakup! I'm never tired," Jacky announced, and departed, dragging Claire by the hand, tug-boat wise.

The door closed behind them, and Ethel looked across at her cousin. "What is to be done?" she questioned.

"Smile, dear one—love on, hope on; . . . take up your cross and face it."

"I hate crosses, and I can't smile when I am insulted."

"He didn't mean to insult you, Ethel. This case has got on his nerves. He can't write. It is worrying him—try to bear with him; it will soon be over now."

"I doubt it," said Ethel, "and I can't see why writing should make a man so . . . so . . ."

"No, dear! Don't say it. Remember the other day at breakfast, and forgive him."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't he tell you?"

"He tells me nothing. Apparently his affairs are above my comprehension. He prefers to confide in you."

"Ethel!"

In a moment the two girls were in each other's arms, Ethel hiding her face on Helen's shoulder. "No, no," she half sobbed; "I didn't mean that. I didn't mean anything. You are my own ownest—and I am miserable, and silly, and . . ."

"My cousin's wife?" Helen asked, a little wistfully.

"Yes, yes; . . . but I ought to be consulted—and it isn't fair to snub one just because . . ."

"Because what?"

"Because, perhaps, I'm not so artistic as . . . not artistic enough to see the necessity for writing just at the top level—when, if you go a little down, it would

mean so much to us. . . . And Helen," she went on, with a sudden rush of words, "we do want the pennies so. They are so difficult to get, and there is such a lot to pay, and. . . oh, everything," she concluded, lamely.

"You can have all mine, sweetest," Helen laughed. "Every penny if you like."

"Yes—and that is what I will not have. It isn't fair—and Arthur ought to see it—and . . ."

"Don't you think perhaps he does?" Helen questioned. Then, as Ethel seemed inclined to resent this, she put up her cheek, and rubbing softly, said, "No, no—he didn't say so. Never spoke of it. . . I guessed it, dreamt it, found it lying about on the stairs, and so . . ."

"Tell me what happened at breakfast," Ethel demanded, sitting down beside the table, "or I shan't believe you."

"A bargain, sweetest," Helen answered. "Mind you keep your half. . . Well, you saw that article in the paper, didn't you, by N. C.?"

"Yes, Arthur was reading it when I came down—what of it?"

"Arthur wrote it."

"How do you know?"

"By what happened after. He gave it to you to read—and . . ."

"Yes, I know. I forgot it."

"And he burnt it."

"Well, and how was I to know he had written it? Why this secrecy? It isn't fair to me. Why can't he sign what he writes, and why should he behave as though I . . . Oh, I haven't patience."

"Bear with it, dearest; it will soon be over."

"I doubt it," said Ethel.

"No, dear, you don't. For if you did you would be miserable. Now, promise me—when he comes in, be kind to him. Kiss him, and be your own sweet self. Give him a cup of tea. . . Pass him the toast—he loves toast—an egg, bacon, anything you can think of, and you'll see he will be quite ready to make amends. Promise, before I go."

Ethel rose from her seat at the table and crossed over

to the fire. "In other words, 'feed the brutes,'" she said. "No, I can't. I am tired of appeals, and blandishments are ineffectual at this stage. No, don't go. There is no occasion. Arthur will not come in again. I know him."

"Dearest, forget, forget . . ."

"I have been forgetting for months—ever since we returned home. On the *Coorong* for twelve months I saw this trouble approaching—long before there was any case to worry him or any hint of a case. No, Arthur is tired of me and my attractions; and if I had not had a very good counsellor always at hand these three months, I should have told him so.

"You, dear," she went on, holding out her arms to Helen, "have kept me silent. In your own sweet unobtrusive way you have bid me do my duty, and I have done it in spite of the knowledge that has been forced upon me. . . . Nay, don't start. He will not come in. . . . I tell you he will not," she reiterated, as the sounds outside proclaimed the fact that the master of the house had come downstairs and was preparing to depart.

"Go to him, Ethel," Helen begged, twining her arms about her. "Go this once, to please me."

"I can't, sweet."

"It is your obvious duty."

"Then I shall neglect it."

"Ethel! . . ."

"Listen, Helen—what did I say, what did I tell you?"

Steps resounded crossing the hall—noisy steps, telling of anger, impatience; then the front door opened, and Arthur Norris, dressed for the city, and wearing a heavy coat, moved quickly down the drive.

Upstairs, at the nursery window, little hands tapped loudly to attract dad; but dad had no ears for infant chatter, no eyes for anything but the gravel-path he trod.

The two girls crossed over and stood beside the old window seat.

"Wave," said Helen, "wave him good-bye."

"He will not turn," said Ethel.

"He will. . . . At the gate he must. Promise to wave."

"I will, if he turns," said Ethel.

They stood watching; but Arthur Norris, who could not hear the rat-a-plan on the nursery window, could scarcely be expected to search for waved farewells at the hands of his wife and cousin.

Ethel crossed over and sank into a cosy chair beside the fire.

"I have heard," she said coldly, "that women who fetch and carry for their husbands usually end as petitioners in the divorce court."

"Have patience, dearest; pray, have patience," Helen pleaded.

"A man who slams doors is outcast."

A new firmness had come into the soft full voice, new expression, new decision. Helen saw it, and recognised that the battle went against her. She could only repeat, "No; he loves you. . . . Have patience."

"That is precisely what I intend," said Ethel. "Hitherto, since—oh, since quite the early days I have done all the loving. Now he must love me . . . or . . ."

"No, dear; don't say it," Helen begged.

And Ethel, sitting staring into the fire, granted her prayer.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE NECESSITY FOR OBLIVION.

Arthur Norris came down to Woodside and boarded the ferry-boat lying rubbing sides with the pier. For a man in a hurry he showed few signs of it; for a man with an appointment in Liverpool long overdue he had chosen the most leisurely method of crossing the river. The electric railway would have landed him in James Street in half the time occupied by the ferry in transporting him to the landing-stage. But Norris heeded nothing of this. He walked the deck round and round in company with a



portion of that great army of business men who cross the Mersey daily thus, and gain a fleeting gleam of freshness.

The boat was thronged. The people tramped as though intent on doing "their mile" in the crossing—men, women, girls. They were all absorbed—all had business which drew them cityward. As Fenchurch, Cannon Street, London Bridge, and the northern termini pour their thousands of top-hatted men upon the streets of London in the morning hours, so the Mersey ferries pour their thousands on the landing-stage at Liverpool. They step ashore fresh from ten minutes in the open—ten minutes life-giving, exhilarating progress, denied to the inhabitants of the greater city by the exigencies of their environment.

Of all who stood or walked or sat on the ferry's deck eyeing the moving panorama of shipping, the sparkling wavelets, and breathing the clean, salt air, Norris, perhaps, was the only one whom no business called, at all events in the sense in which those others knew it.

He was going to Liverpool for no definite reason. His business appointment was a figure of speech, a metaphor culled to remove him quickly from a difficult position. He had no intention of doing anything in particular. He felt it necessary to be away from home. He was sick of petticoat government; sick of seeing himself pitied and neglected in turn; sick of the position into which he had descended through mere force of circumstance—that is how he phrased it, standing still a moment to watch the throng busily promenading,—“mere force of circumstance.”

The glare of faces annoyed him and he tramped again round the boat once, in line with the rest, then came to a halt near the stern. He looked down at the boiling wake which trailed bubbling nearly at right angles to their course, and for a moment a dizziness smote him. The river had developed a fascination that was quite strange and infinitely perplexing. He knew the water was cold, that the tide ran swiftly outward, that the sizzling beads were not diamonds sparkling for him to clutch; but there stood the notion—deriding, baffling, beckoning. It

was not a river, it was not water—cold to the touch; the things floating there in the yeast were diamonds. Stooping from a boat he might gather them; swimming, they would joggle his limbs. He stared. He desired, above all things, the privilege of pushing his fingers amidst those diamonds. He longed to stand knee deep in them and shovel them into baskets, as he had seen them shovelled at the mines—then felt suddenly that he was lurching—falling against the rail.

Some one stood over him as he recovered, and he noticed that others were crowding round.

"Feel faint?" said the man, helping him to his feet.

"No—no . . . quite right. Staggered—that's all."

"Jove! I thought you were going to climb the rail. Sure you are all serene, eh?"

"Quite. Yes; I think the boat lurched, or something. Yes; quite all right, and many thanks."

He marched on, dimly conscious that something had happened—that he felt dizzy, tired, and must see a doctor; that he must get some breakfast; knew that he was the centre of attraction, that his face was pallid, but walked doggedly with the rest. He passed a group standing under the lee of the funnel, and heard one say, "Yes, it was Captain Norris—lives out Bidston way—fine old house. Captain of the ship that was run down in . . ."

The speaker's voice fell away as Norris came past. He turned about and pointed to the New Brighton and Seacombe ferries coming into line for the stage, and packed with people; but Norris moved on. He took no interest in these events. They seemed to be very trivial—quite unworthy his notice. He desired to be landed at the stage, to find a cab and gallop somewhere out of earshot, out of sight—somewhere where perhaps he might be able to find a doctor who could tell him what he must do. That was his necessity.

Before he had reached the broad roadway fronting Prince's Parade, where the trams circle and wheel, following each other like children at play, he had come to the conclusion that this was why he was journeying to Liverpool. He desired to see a doctor.

The people flocking up the steep gangways from the landing-stage jostled his elbows. They crowded past him seeking opportunities of running the gauntlet of those whirring trams. Some made their way in front, others climbed on board, others again waited till the cars were past and crossed the wide road behind. Everywhere was hurry and bustle, the rush of people all intent on "getting there."

An old woman, lined and halt of aspect, standing under a corner of the glass roof, with match-boxes tremblingly evident, proffered him aid, seeing he stood uncertain. But Norris scarcely heard. He was watching the swinging, pirouetting trams, watching half-mazed as they dashed empty from the streets, advanced to the pierhead, cut, set to partners, and swept about like sentient beings, then broke away untouched, without effort, and danced loaded for the city. Gongs clanged. Whistles on the river roared brazenly. Newsboys came past at the run—clad in rags, bare-foot, bare-legged, bare-headed, and blue with the cold—shouting already the second edition of some evening liar. Match boys, match girls—ragged, miserable, stunted—pressed on every hand offering their wares, but always the stream of life passed onward, passed over them making for the city. Business men, sailors, girls, vagrants, loungers, firemen, touts, shop-girls, crowded the pavements—moving to the trams or making ready to dart between. Some carried bundles, others bags, others tightly-folded umbrellas—but nowhere was a cab to be seen. The electric current was switched on, and the noisy, irrational, beautiful horse was dead and at peace—at all events here.

This fact arrived in course of time, and Norris, suddenly alive to it, decided that the only way of finding a cab was by searching the streets leading to the city. It was a truth he knew of long experience, but at this moment, out of some odd caprice, it seemed something new, something to be discovered and worked out by laborious mental process. Therefore had he stood long on the edge of the pavement, and allowed precious minutes to elapse which should have been occupied in reaching a doctor. He

argued the thing quite sanely, and mentally passed censure on his indecision. There was some reason for it, he knew—still, it might be kept in check. To permit it to run riot in this fashion was suicide pure and simple. So he decided facing the racket.

A bicyclist arrived at the footpath, having run the gauntlet of the trams, ringing his bell, unscathed. The example appealed to Norris, and he crossed the road in the path of a two-decker bound for Old Swan. The gong clanged harshly, the driver applied his brake, and some score of frightened people witnessed Norris passing buoyantly out of danger to dodge a further plunging line of cars arriving for the pirouette. Men say that those who are drunk are never killed; whether statistics are on their side or against them stands as nothing beside the fact that Norris, who at this time was drunk of a very subtle cause, danced clean out of danger, much as a paper blown by the wind of an advancing train whirls out of reach of the grinding wheels.

He gained the pavement, and moved swinging round the curve for James Street. The people all went his way—men, women, beggars, merchants,—some walking with hands clasped behind them, others industriously prodding the pavement with their sticks, others carrying umbrellas pointed to catch the eye of unwary citizens approaching behind. They came abreast of the harbour-master's office, a hoary building nestling in the roar of the overhead railway, and almost in the path of the whirring trams and heavy traffic of the streets.

A train laden from the seaward docks was passing up, a bell clanging with every revolution of the crank-shaft, and trams and people stood waiting to cross the track. Norris halted with the rest, staring at the crowd, listening to the city's voices; and out of the mass of faces immediately circling him sprang one he knew. Young Spain, the junior partner in Harrod, Bocker, & Spain, lawyers of Slater's Court and Norris's defenders, approached, elbowing his way.

"Hallo, Norris, . . . where away?" he asked, touching

"Oh, up town for a . . . a prow!"

"Lucky man. See what faces me each day. Cases, courts, pleadings, transfers. . . . Hallo, though! By Jove, you look seedy. Anything wrong?"

"No, a bit giddy just now."

"Giddy, eh? Hah! Jovial man. Been going it a bit? Take my tip. Never burn the candle both ends—doesn't work. Plays old Harry with a man's constitution, y' know."

Norris had no reply ready. He looked at the smart, turned-down-stand-up-collared youth at his side with the vague intention of administering advice, but before the sentences were framed, young Spain was jerkily pressing him forward.

"Come along. All clear again. You don't look very fit. I'll see you across to the other side. Devil of a nuisance these dock lines, hindering busy people in the middle of the morning. It ought to be stopped." An overhead train thundered down, shaking the street. "Oh, damn the noise! . . . By the way," he went on, as they ran the gauntlet of the drays and trollies carrying produce from the shipping, "I think our case comes on next week. Let me see, this is Saturday—yes, next week, probably on Thursday. We will advise you, of course."

"You don't want me to-day, I suppose?" Norris ventured.

"No—we have everything ready. By the way, though, I suppose you haven't come across that man Flynn yet?"

"No—why?"

"He's in Liverpool. Well, you are safe, and I must run down this way. See you in a few days."

Norris stood on the edge of the pavement precisely as though he had been placed there by his nurse and he was a baby again. He stared up the street asking himself what it was he had come to do. Here was the street with tall offices on either hand, trams, carts, cabs prowling and slipping its length. From somewhere at this extraordinary moment Flynn was approaching; Flynn who carried certain idiotic notions in his head which he desired to sell—Flynn. . . . He turned angrily on his

heel. Flynn must go hang. He couldn't bother with him now. There was this business of breakfast and the doctor to occupy him—breakfast was the first consideration always, and in all countries where people get up and go to work and money is to be made. Money! The thing for which men die and women sell themselves. Norris admitted it, sarcastically twisting the words.

A cab came slowly down the street looking for a fare, and the driver, seeing Norris halted there searching the street, drew up beside the curb with a rush—"Cab, sir?"

Norris observed him and entered.

"Where to, sir?"

"Breakfast," said Norris, "and drive like . . . like . . . Jehu the son of Nimshi."

There could be but one meaning to this. The cabman decided his fare had been on the tiles all night, and wheeling his horse with a grin, clattered full pace up street. "Breakfast!" he chuckled; "'ee looks as though 'ee wanted it."

Norris leaned forward, content to watch the stream of people moving and occupied with affairs of which he had no knowledge, felt the breeze playing on his cheeks, lifted his hat and sat breathing deep, generous draughts of air. He was hungry, thirsty, he must have something at once. It was a necessity.

The cab moved swiftly down Lord Street and drew up at the Bear. Norris descended, paid his fare, and entering the restaurant demanded breakfast.

A waiter approached, napkin on arm, and proffered the card—"Fish, sir—chops, steaks, cutlets, 'am—'am an

"Bring me," said Norris, with fine disregard for the man's roll-call, "a caviare on toast, cutlet and mashed potatoes\*to follow—bread, butter, squish . . ."

"Bed pardon, sir—squish, sir?"

"Marmalade, man. Where's your . . . your head?"

The waiter smiled. "Beg pardon, sir—yes sir . . . tea hor coffee, sir?"

"Heidseck—small bottle."

The waiter scented a lordly tip and moved away sprack

as a boy to earn it. He, too, decided that Norris had been on the tiles all night—"Caviare on toast at ten-thirty, ha, hem! . . . heidseck, . . . well there, an' when all's said an' done haven't the gent a right to be where he wants an' w'en he wants?" The waiter gave his order with a flourish and whisked off to flick the table and set it afresh. Business was beginning early to-day.

But Norris, unconscious of the speculation he was arousing, sat huddled in his chair twisting a copy of yesterday's 'Times' and reading nothing. The matter that appealed to him above all else was the question of that dream of his at the ferry. He could have sworn he saw diamonds. He angled for a solution of the mystery, turning it in his brain, examining it and failing altogether to come to grips. The explanation eluded him. The diamonds were there. He had seen them shimmering at his feet—and yet . . . For fifteen minutes the question enthralled him, refusing to be decided, then came the caviare, heidseck, and a new interest dawned.

He ate ravenously. The toast vanished. Cutlets, potatoes, heidseck, bread and butter, squish—all vanished, and at something past eleven, he leaned back in his chair advising himself he felt better. The giddiness had disappeared. The mystery of the diamonds no longer worried him. It stood in his memory now simply as a thing to be explained, to be presented to a doctor for elucidation.

He came from the Bear wiser by one turn of the wheel than when he entered, then stood on the curb beckoning a cab. The man drew up at the pavement, and to him Norris explained his desire.

"A doctor, sir. Yes, any one in particu<sup>lar</sup>?"

"I know of none—this side. But you must."

The cabman knew of several, would the gent step inside. The gent would and did. Then through the trap door the cabman expatiated on the advantages to be gained by seeing the right man, and the easiest way of finding him would be to see the club doctor, "Just round the corner, sir, at the dispensary," and get the tip. Norris bid him "Go to the devil but find a doctor," and lay back in the cab, arms in loop.

They came therefore to the club doctor, who looked at Norris through his gold-rimmed spectacles, touched his pulse, and turning to the driver, said, "Run him up to Doctor Slaney-Wilson, Rodney Street, Owen, as quickly as you can," and in answer to Arthur's question—

"No, not at all. I have done nothing. Your business is not in my line—yes, thanks. Glad to have been able to direct you."

They clattered down street, got jammed in the traffic at Whitechapel crossing, then bounded away up Church Street, Bold Street, round to the left, up Hardman Street, and came to the house standing in the Harley Street of Liverpool. Here Norris alighted, and bidding the cabman wait, rang the bell. A boy in buttons admitted him and showed him into a waiting-room.

A number of people sat there in chairs pulled up to the fire and beside the table, examining the weekly and monthly periodicals. Norris sat down near the window. He felt elated at his decision in this matter. A curious sense of aloofness lay over all his actions. He tried to analyse them, but, for some unexplained reason, could not confine himself to one line of thought. There was the diamond episode, the Flynn episode, the necessity for breakfast which had put both aside and now made him lose the thread. This matter of Flynn must be taken in hand too, presently. It was curious that he should have turned up at this moment—annoying—exasperating. Norris leaned back in his chair to decide how he should tackle this matter, then some one came to the door demanding a name and the thread dropped. A large lady with an anæmic daughter moved to obey, and again Norris sat brooding over his sensations, head sunk, eyes examining the pattern on the heavy pile carpet.

People came in, others went out. The boy arrived methodically, repeated a name and departed towing a patient. And in this fashion, at length Norris came into the presence.

Dr Wilson stood with his back to the fire as he entered, but instantly advanced to meet him. "Captain Norris?" he questioned.

Norris bowed.



"A doctor down town sent me up here," he explained. "Don't know his name—the cabman said he belonged to a club—so, as I wished to see a doctor, I came. It seemed to be the right thing to do. I felt so beastly seedy—can't sleep, can't rest—and then there was this idiotic business of the diamonds bothering me, . . . and . . ."

"Diamonds?" the doctor interjected.

Norris explained the apparition at length.

"Precisely—er—" Dr Wilson's eyes had been at work, and already he had decided something behind the blank mask he showed to Norris. "Oh, by the way," he said in the soft, cultured voice of a man who understands how to produce it, "I must know one or two things first. You have been abroad, I observe—army?"

"No—sea. Merchant service."

"West Coast at all?"

"Years ago, as an officer."

"Um-m-m! Would you mind undoing your things—collar, shirt, and so on?"

While Norris complied the doctor talked. He led him to speak of the Congo, Niger, and the Cameroons; discovered that these places were hotbeds of malarial fever and that Norris had had it, perhaps ten years ago, and had come out right side up instead of wrong side up, as was generally the case out there. By the time Dr Wilson had discovered this he seemed to lose interest in the matter, and spoke of the rush and drive of modern life, of the effect of telephones, electric cars, and all the necessities demanded by the new generation. Then finding Norris disrobed, got him on a long cane lounge and sounded him.

The operation took some time, and at the end of it, instead of giving information, the doctor desired to be informed on several matters that had always interested him as Norris dressed, then deftly turned the talk to a fresh theme.

"Ever had a fall, or shock of any kind?"

"Never a fall—but a shock—what kind of shock?"

Dr Wilson suggested nothing. Again he waived the point, and went on talking of the general hazards of a

sailor's calling, until Norris, quite at his ease, rested from his labours to say—

"Hazards, yes, you are right. Look at my case for instance. Years ago, when I was a boy, I was burnt out. Ship took fire in the China seas—sou'-west monsoon blowing, . . . devil of a time. Our boats went first thing, and while we were thinking how we were to get ashore without them, a Yank hove in sight and picked us up.

"We came down headers, straight from the top-s'l yards into the sea. What were we up there for? Too jolly hot on deck—nothing to stand on. Had to climb.

"But that was long ago, and the thing doesn't fasten on a man until he gets command. What thing? Well, that for instance—and then, look at the time I had with the poor old *Coorong* . . ."

"Ah—what was that?"

"Run down. Cut in half in a gale of wind off Fastnet. In four minutes there was no *Coorong*, . . . only a spattering of planks and hencoops buzzing about a man's legs. Four minutes isn't a week, doctor. . . . Gad! and the wife and children on board." He moved across to the window and stood looking through the blinds, then turned about to add—"Then there is this case to be fought. Been hanging about for three months already, . . . er . . . what d'you make of it, doctor?"

"Nerves."

"Bad?"

"Sufficiently."

Norris moved a pace nearer, his face working. "What's the upshot, sir? . . . What sort of chance do you give me?"

"Not rosy. You see it has gone on so long—and unattended."

"Thanks . . . er . . . necessary to be in the know; because, you see," Norris explained laboriously, "there are some things I must do first, willy-nilly, and if I go off, it . . ."

"You won't, if you follow my advice. Who is your doctor?"

Norris gave his name. "But," he added, "he hasn't seen me. I haven't seen anybody, and if it hadn't been for the diamond business I shouldn't be here now."

"I will explain that. Now, what stimulant do you take?"

Norris lifted his hands with an appealing gesture. "For God's sake don't knock me off that," he begged. "I must keep going till this trial is over. Nothing else keeps me going—absolutely nothing."

Dr Wilson remained some minutes hesitating. His face showed no sign of it, but there stood the pause, and Norris interpreted it as indecision. Dr Wilson looked up to ask, "When does it come off?"

"Next week."

"Very well, till then, but in moderation mind. No excesses, or I can't be answerable for the result."

"And after?" Norris questioned.

"After—well, give up the sea. Settle down somewhere quietly out of the rush. No whisky, no gaieties, no worry—absolute rest and strict regimen . . ."

"Might just as well be dead," Norris commented. Then, after a pause, and grimly eyeing the doctor, "And if I don't comply?"

Doctor Wilson lifted his shoulders, extending his hands. "I offer you the alternative," he said.

"Aye, a living death. No—I can't promise, . . . er, . . . thanks. I've taken up a beastly lot of your time. You see it's a bit important for me. Fee, sir? . . . Yes, quite so; and if I come through this business all right, I'll let you know. Many thanks."

In the hall Buttons approached, helped him with his coat, held the door wide, and departed to consult his list. Norris climbed into the cab, giving his order through the trap.

"The Bear," he cried; "and drive like the Shaitan!"

He sat back on the cushions staring at the prim porticoes, the long and orderly array of streets, the passing cabs, the people moving busily in the keen air, and came out of his dreams to say—

"No, by Jove! . . . A living death."

CHAPTER XVII.

A QUESTION FOR MRS GRUNDY.

Punctually to the minute the motor car arrived at the cottage, and Callaghan, wrapped in a heavy coat, entered to greet his friends. They were ready, cloaked and hooded for the drive; but Helen, despite her kindling cheeks on meeting Dick, seemed thoughtful, and perhaps a trifle constrained.

"I do wish Arthur would come," she said. "Haven't you seen him?"

"Arthur?—no. Isn't he here?"

"This telegram arrived about twenty minutes ago," Ethel interposed, taking it from the hall table. "You see what he says." And she read aloud—

"'Sorry. Unforeseen detention. Better not wait. Will follow, if possible. NORRIS.'"

"And that, you know, means he will not come," she added parenthetically.

Callaghan looked vexed. The lack of decision so noticeable in the message was characteristic of this new phase in his friend's life. Yet he seemed inclined to resent it.

"*Better* not wait. Will follow, *if* possible," he accentuated. "Really, that makes it very difficult to know how to act."

"Not a bit," Ethel objected. "You see, it is his way of preparing one for the inevitable. He has decided, probably some hours, if I know anything of him."

Callaghan glanced up at the novel intonation, and saw Mrs Norris looking radiant and picturesque in a long green coat and sables, smiling, flushed, and evidently annoyed. It was impossible to withhold sympathy. Callaghan being a man, gave it as the majority give unquestioned the sympathy demanded of us by the eyes of a beautiful woman; but he gave it in silence. He allowed the remark to go unanswered, saying simply—

"Then what do you propose?"

"To go, of course—that is, if you will be our knight?"

"You know I shall be delighted," he returned gravely, amazed at the flutter the simple words had produced.

"Then I vote we start at once. What do you say, Helen?"

"If you think it best," Helen commenced, then paused looking at Callaghan.

But Callaghan was watching Mrs Norris, waiting for her decision.

"I do think so," Ethel announced, her lips giving evidence of her determination in this matter. "It is impossible to warn Colonel Marchmont; he would think us unpardonably squeamish, bourgeois. No; we must go and trust to Arthur being there, or arriving in time to bring us home."

"I was only thinking of convention and Mrs Grundy, dearest," Helen pleaded, smiling.

"A fig for convention, and Mrs Grundy too," her cousin laughed. "I have done with both; and, between us, if Arthur cared two straws about convention, he would be here to support us. Come."

Mrs Norris led the way brightly enough; but behind her vivacity there lurked annoyance and a recollection of the scenes through which she had passed, though but little of this appeared on the surface—for women are very zealous guardians of the daily fret and jar of matrimony. They hide it sometimes by laughter, sometimes by open disregard of the conventions; but they hide it. And here as elsewhere the make-believe was present, bidding the girl act and keep the skeleton from strangers. The brightness of Ethel's eyes, the colour in her cheeks, the firm enunciation, all spoke to it; but hints of this kind are easily attributable to other causes—belladonna, cosmetique, liqueur—say the cynics and all other envious persons; and so Ethel's friends may be pardoned for joining in a madness they all desired with equal fervour. If she had qualms, she concealed them very daintily. That they saw.

Deeside, with its magnificent amphitheatre of clustered mountains lying dimly to stay the river's hand; the fine

old manor-house, and a ride through the night on that dark and mysterious thing throbbing and vibrant outside—well, who of us would resist? And if it were madness, how far was the madness qualified by sanity?

Ethel argued the matter from the practical view of the housekeeper. They were not rich; Arthur's pay had ceased since the day of the collision. Apparently he had found difficulty in obtaining a fresh command; for although he said nothing on this head, it was recognisable that he went to the City almost daily, to the Docks not unfrequently, and came back to sit and brood in his chair before the fire as though he had lost all hope and saw only ruin confronting him.

And now at this moment Callaghan intervened, with the expressed wish of Colonel Marchmont, to push farther the friendship and sympathy he and his sister had offered so freely on the *Sentinel*. Colonel Marchmont was a man of vast influence; shipowners and other Liverpoolian bigwigs were his associates; and, as Callaghan reminded her, there was M'Gee. It was impossible to imagine that anything but good could come from an introduction heralded in this fashion.

But Arthur could not see it, or, if he saw it, took care to throw every obstacle in the path of progress. From Ethel's point of view as housekeeper and equal sharer in the burdens of Heath Cottage, this was madness, and to temper the madness of the husband by the clear-seeing action of the wife was not to add to the madness but to introduce sanity. So she argued.

They came out at once and entered the car, laughing gaily at the introduction of the Grundy theme amidst such sober and staid friends. Captain Callaghan as knight! "Such nonsense!" Ethel announced, as they started up the drive; "why, you are Arthur's oldest friend. The man who groomed him for me, years ago, and whom we still call Dick—when we dare. It's true, Helen—*n'est ce pas, chérie?*" she cried out to her cousin beside the chauffeur.

Helen had no answer ready. Indeed she thanked the darkness for its presence, and the hum of the machine for

its noise, which found, perchance, an excuse for her silence. But behind, in the twin luxurious seats, she heard Callaghan's reply—

"I hope you will always remember me as Dick—even if you will not call me so," and her heart leaped at the concluding phrase addressed to her, "you too, Miss Douglas."

Again Helen thanked the darkness, and turned radiantly with the retort, "I never call a man by his Christian name who calls me Miss."

"Then it's a bargain. Helen, Ethel, in future?" said Callaghan.

"Yes."

"Yes what?"

"Dick," said Ethel.

But Miss Douglas apparently had not heard.

In less than an hour, despite the dark roads, they had crossed the Wirral, and were drawing up beside the deep stone portico at the Manor. Colonel Marchmont appeared as they entered, and welcomed them in the good old fashion of long ago, in the hall.

"Delighted to see you, Mrs Norris—you, too, Miss Douglas. Let me help you with your wraps. Brisk night for a run. I envied you. Jove! I very nearly caught myself coming in to fetch you, but I reflected that the car has limitations. Very similar to our own when you come to think of it. . . . No? Ah, Callaghan! glad to see you—and . . . hallo! where's Norris—not shut out, eh?"

"I'm afraid," Callaghan commenced, then Ethel's voice took up the plaint as Colonel Marchmont turned to face her. "Then he has not arrived?" she questioned.

"No—did you expect to find him here?"

"Yes and no, Colonel Marchmont. The fact is that at the last moment we received a wire from my husband, who was in Liverpool you know, telling us not to wait, and inferring that he would come direct, if possible."

"If possible," Marchmont echoed, "why, of course it's possible."

"That's what he said, . . . and after all . . ."

Ethel hesitated, then added with a flash of merriment, "you really must be thankful we have not doubled your disappointment."

"Disappointments," said the Colonel, "are sometimes called blessings in disguise, Mrs Norris."

"Oh, but we are not disguised," Ethel challenged.

Colonel Marchmont bowed.

"No—but perhaps the disappointment is."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DINNER AT THE MANOR.

"A millionaire," said Colonel Marchmont, as they took their places at table and the servants left the room,— "a millionaire is a person the public kisses and kicks in the same breath. It kisses him to get a taste of the millions, and it kicks him because he won't part—don't let us talk of him."

There was so much feeling in the colonel's voice that Ethel glanced up in astonishment, smiling, vivacious as of old.

"You brought it on yourself," she announced; "you shouldn't dangle allurements before one and then refuse to discuss them."

"Did I?" he questioned. "Sorry. I should have been more discreet—but why do you call them allurements?"

"Aren't things we want and can't get allurements always? And, as an offset, aren't we all bidden to strive after the unattainable?"

He met her smiling eyes, and countered with "Personally, I prefer to strive after the attainable."

"And when you have gained it?"

"I do not always gain it."

"Then it is the unattainable," she reminded him.

"Yes, until I win it."



A small bell, stationed in the midst of the ferns standing on a sea of glass in the centre of the table, rang a silvery peal, and there appeared from a well-sunk deep in the foliage, a carriage bearing plates and sliced water-melon. Colonel Marchmont, sitting at the head of his table, touched a button, and the course moved round, halting before each guest in turn.

No servants were present. No sound had been made, yet here was dinner already served. The two girls expressed their delight and surprise, while M'Gee, who with his wife completed the party, looked across at Marchmont and said—

"I presume somebody said something to call forth that remark of yours, Barney?"

"Of course. Mrs Norris happened to witness your gorgeous reception the other night, and commented on the account she read in the papers."

"Kindly," Ethel put in. "And I was going to say, when that pretty waiter came to interrupt me, that I preferred the scene on the stage to the scene as depicted by the reporters."

"That goes without saying," Marchmont acknowledged; "but to return to the question of harrying the unattainable, I should like to suggest that I wish very much that you would go in for the attainable, and leave the rest outside."

"The attainable, . . . me?" she smiled, wondering what came.

"You can sing. You have a wonderful voice, . . . if you care to work it, you can attain . . ." He broke off, pushed his fingers through his hair, and added suddenly, "Attain! Good gracious! you will have the world at your feet."

"Thanks," she flashed, demurely, "I prefer the world where it is."

"I mean it," he admonished, quickly grave.

"It is impossible."

"Impossible—pardon. You have the voice, you have the temperament, the soul. May one ask why it is impossible?"

She glanced up with a scarcely perceptible frown. "My husband would not like me to sing in public," she decided.

"Have you suggested it?"

"There is no occasion, I know."

Colonel Marchmont watched the beautiful face, but caught no hint. It was perfectly under control; the irritation had vanished, and although the girl's heart leaped at the bare notion of fame, her eyes showed nothing.

"If you will allow me," he said in his quieter manner, "I will see Captain Norris and enlist him on our side."

"If you could!" she cried, alive at this, "oh! if you could. But it is useless. Arthur has a horror of the stage—it is his *bête noir*."

"But surely the concert platform is not the stage?"

"It belongs."

"Scarcely—but I may try, . . . you give me leave?"

"My dear Colonel," she smiled, leaning forward, "if you can persuade Arthur to let me go in for music, you will have attained the unattainable."

They laughed gaily, and Marchmont instantly became engrossed with his duties as host, pressing buttons and switching the car from guest to guest, until, loaded with empty plates, it ran smoothly to the lift and sank out of sight.

"What a lovely notion," said Helen, as she watched the delicate movements. "Do you ever have accidents?"

"Not now. I am expert, you see. Prefer this kind of thing, *en famille*, especially when M'Gee is here. You see it is something to watch. There is no necessity for conversation, and M'Gee can ape the Board of Trade if I have an accident and demand an inquiry."

M'Gee, who hitherto had seemed content to beam through a gold pince-nez from his end of the table, looked up at this and said to Callaghan, "By the way, when does your case come on?"

"Shortly, I believe."

"I don't see it down yet," the great man objected.

"No, but I am advised they are pressing to get it taken next week."

M'Gee made no comment. The steely expression of his eyes seemed for a moment to grow more marked, the lines about his clean-shaven mouth took a deeper note. He turned to Helen, who sat on his right, and said, "I understand you paint, Miss Douglas?"

"I try to," she corrected.

"That isn't fair," Callaghan interrupted, "Miss Douglas does more than try—she succeeds."

"Good," M'Gee commented, watching her; "and, if one may ask, do you find much difficulty in disposing of your work or getting into the shows?"

"It has not been easy,—still," she returned, smiling, "I have been more fortunate than some, and less fortunate than I hoped to be."

"Pray explain," said M'Gee, in the voice he might have used to a small but pretty child. He regarded her, meanwhile, over the rim of his folders.

"Well, you see, I have a cousin, Mr Wastall, on the hanging committee . . ."

"Wastall—Wastall, . . . of Slater, Wastall, & Jukes, the solicitors?"

"Yes."

"Hum," said M'Gee. "I know Wastall. Able man. Should have gone to the bar."

He dismissed the matter from his mind and looked at Helen questioningly, "You were saying," he suggested.

"Well, I had painted a picture, a grey, sad thing of the shipping and docks, and I rather wished to send it to the Gallery. I have seen worse on the walls—but I chanced to ask my agents, who were getting it framed for me, whether they advised me to do so. Their head man, a Scottish artist by the way, was looking at it for me, and he replied, not very enthusiastically I fancied, that I might try my luck. He added that I seemed to have caught the fashionable tone. I don't know whether he meant that 'sarcastic,' but I do know that it was the tone of the docks, and that I was very keen to get it hung. So I told him I had a relative on the hanging committee, and asked whether he thought I had better send him a line to ensure that it should

be looked at—for, of course," Helen added, "I was imbued with the notion that half the pictures are never seen, much less judged, and I did want it to be hung."

"Aye," said M'Gee, "I can understand that. Well, what did he say?"

"He looked at the picture and then looked at me—'Yes,' he said, in a slow cautious fashion, 'you might write—but,' as an afterthought struck him, 'I suppose ye'll wish it tae be hung on its meerits?'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed M'Gee, with genuine amusement, "Scotch. I could have sworn to it. Well, . . ."

"Of course I said, 'Yes.' And I was indignant, and vowed it should be hung on its merits, and I didn't write."

"But it was not hung," M'Gee decided, smiling gravely at the soft, dark face so entrancingly alive with desire.

"No. It came back. It was not accepted even provisionally."

"And you cried," said M'Gee, in his still, unemotional fashion.

Helen looked up, her eyes flashing,—“Yes,” she admitted, “I cried. And you would have done the same if you could have guessed what it meant to me.”

"No," said M'Gee, "I should have sent it somewhere else, with a letter from Wastall, and it would have been hung. In art, as on the stage," he went on impressively, "it is necessary—almost essential—to make a reputation before you can hope for appreciation."

"That sounds very horrid," said Ethel; "I should hardly have thought you a cynic, Mr M'Gee."

"Nor am I. I am a business man, and I want you to recognise one or two things which confront you. There are thousands who paint well in these days, people who only want the chance to render them famous. The public does not know them—has never heard of them—and, unless the position changes, never will know them. Very well, what is to be done?—of course I premise that the work must be good.

"It seems to me," he went on, as no one appeared ready with an answer, "that you can wait and trust to luck, or

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"It seems to me," he went on, as no one appeared ready with an answer, "that you can wait and trust to luck, or

you can strive to do something that will render you famous, or you can do what many certainly do, resort to advertisement. These people argue they are justified, and I am not prepared to deny it. They do good work, but they have not caught on, and they are not appreciated."

"Oh, but surely the work should bring its own appreciation," Helen threw out with a quick gesture of dissent.

"My dear Miss Douglas," M'Gee interposed, bowing gravely, "if you hold to that view I have nothing more to say."

"It was a suggestion,—I should like to hear your opinion. Of course I know very little about it, but . . ." she paused, and glanced at the gold-rimmed eyes before her.

"Precisely. You are young and enthusiastic. I am older and have lost any enthusiasm I may have had. I know the world. Nothing is done without advertisement. In these days it is essential. How, for instance, are people to know that you paint if you don't tell them so?"

Helen pursed her lips, shaking her head,—*"Afraid I can't answer,"* she decided.

"That is not to be wondered at. Well,—we must find an advertisement for you, . . . something noticeable—um-m-m!" he rubbed his chin thoughtfully between finger and thumb, then said in his grave manner, "Have you ever been buried alive, by any chance?"

Helen shook her head, laughing at the notion,—*"Afraid I haven't,"* she announced.

"Ah—that's a pity," said M'Gee. "No,—Miss Douglas understands me," he asserted, as the room echoed at this admission. "It would have provided an amusing advertisement. Never been starving, . . . lived on a crust for a week in order to buy canvasses,—anything of the sort?"

"No, . . . no,—never," Helen replied, quivering.

"Then I fear we are in a bad way. Think it out, Miss Douglas. You must have done something. No occasion to stick to veracity, you know. Something to stagger humanity, as Oom Paul said, is what we want—

something out of the common run. Now if you could manage to live for a week on grass, and could get somebody to snapshot you, there would be no doubt about your success. You would leap into notoriety," M'Gee decided, warming to his work, "and your pictures would sell like whisky."

Helen laughed till the tears came. "I am afraid I am hopeless," she said; "I shall never get known in that way."

"But you need not appear," said the man of millions. "Get some one to be taken for you."

Helen stared, and M'Gee, amused at her honest mystification, rambled on at his ease.

"I knew a man, stoney-broke out West," he told her, "who had invented some special sort of brain pill. He was a bit of a genius in his way, but he couldn't persuade folk to try his pills. He had no presence, couldn't speak, and had the face of a malefactor. Well, one day when he was on his last legs he met, walking down Fifth Avenue, a man with a head, a face, and a presence. Of course, being an American citizen, my friend had no hesitation in putting the question to him point-blank; and, in less than an hour, he had acquired proprietary rights in about as philanthropic and high-minded a face as you will see in a lifetime. That man's photo, published with a short excerpt from the life of a well-known philanthropist, not necessarily true I expect, worked miracles. My friend formed a company on that face. Got himself fixed in as perpetual president at a salary running into thousands of dollars per annum. He holds the bulk of the shares, and makes his pill factory hum in a way that would surprise you if you could see him as I did, on the broad of his back in ninety-two. There is nothing in the pills," M'Gee concluded, sadly reminiscent, "but there's a lot in the face that sells 'em."

At the other end of the table Ethel leaned towards her host and asked swiftly, "Will advertisement be necessary in my case too?"

And Colonel Marchmont met her eyes with his steady gaze, saying, "I don't believe in it. It would be unnecessary for Miss Douglas; but for you,"—he laid one



hand on the white wrist beside him, and pressing it, added,—“for you it would be absurd. Your face would carry you anywhere.”

Ethel's eyes flashed triumph as she raised her glass, and Callaghan caught the gleam.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE SUBTLETIES OF SONG.   o

Dinner was over, and Helen with Callaghan at her side walked up and down the terrace overlooking the moonlit valley.

Down there, dreamily revelling in the haze, the Dee wound like a silver thread at the foot of the silent hills. Across the river were Mostyn, Flint, and Connah's Quay, places which in daytime are seen to be filled with tall chimneys vomiting blackness over the fair landscape, but now sunk in shadow and marked by the dim fires which are never suffered to go out at pit and foundry. In a few hours the buzzers would blare an angry summons to the workers; then would the factories hum and the smoke pour forth again omnipotent. For the nonce only was there peace.

From within the music-room came the sound of Ethel's voice singing that masterpiece of Frederick Clay, “The Sands of Dee.” It was marvellous to listen to, marvellous to note the subtle changes, the passion, the entreaty ringing so thrillingly through the open windows. The night lay at rest to hear. The long, flat stretches of sand shimmering softly in the moonlight held out a listening finger, begging for peace. On one was a point of fire, a warning to those who moved upon the river's face, avoiding the sands. The song was of them, reminiscent of their power, reminiscent of the power of the long dead musician who had focussed the actuality of their being.

"The Sands of Dee——" the words came out with entrancing pathos, the notes of the violin thrown in, wayward, haunting, like the cry of a human soul. That was Marchmont's interpretation. Helen, leaning silent in her chair and watching the glow of Callaghan's cigar, knew that when Ethel sang presently the public would acclaim her. It was inevitable. No advertisement would be required, no idiotic schemes for fortune-making. She doubted whether it was necessary with any artist—providing, of course, the necessary touch was there, the mind-compelling touch of genius. A great revulsion took possession of her. Why did that odious man tell his stories of advertisement-made fame at her expense? Was it impossible to get away for a moment from the hoardings which had made him? That is how the thing appeared to her, now the ordeal was past. Colonel Marchmont she was prepared to like, but M'Gee! An expressive gesture awakened her to the fact that the music had ceased. She rose suddenly, and with Callaghan again at her side passed slowly up and down beneath the sheltering colonnade.

Viewed calmly in the presence of that wondrous landscape, music chastening them, the events of the evening seemed paltry and disquieting to these two. They were troubled by them. Arthur's inexplicable absence and Ethel's vivacity, coupled with the note of ostentation struck by M'Gee, puzzled the girl and set her thinking. The undeniable cynicism of it too—money first, last, and always; the articulation of what money and nothing but money can do; the relation between art and money, success and notoriety,—all rankled in that artistic soul, rammed with ideals and hero-worship. She decided on her fourth turn that it was bad taste, appalling.

Callaghan, had he been questioned, would have laughed at the notion which, nevertheless, oppressed him and kept him silent. He was annoyed with Norris and disappointed with Ethel. He decided that she should be more guarded. It was scarcely fair to his friend that she should display quite so reckless an attitude. Again, he objected to the tone of cynicism which had run banteringly all through

the conversation. Even Ethel had joined issue. It was unlike her. He could not understand it. He was vexed with Marchmont, vexed with Ethel—yet listened entranced to the music which floated past him and rolled down amidst those grand old trees to Deeside. He found himself listening with pleasure. These two made it—Ethel and Marchmont—the two who had annoyed him. He questioned very much whether he had occasion for annoyance, and suddenly heard Helen saying rather viciously—

"I think it an awful pity to bring the two things in line in that way, don't you?"

"What things?" Callaghan ventured, quickly alive to his delinquencies.

"Oh, art, money, advertisement, . . . but you were not thinking of that and you are bothered—what is it?"

"How do you know I am bothered?" he asked smiling.

"Well, you see I paint, and painters have a knack of studying faces. Yours said you were bothered—may I share?"

Callaghan laughed and resumed his promenade. "Yes," he said, "you are right. Just now it was Ethel and Norris, now it is . . . Ethel herself. I am wondering . . ." He paused, puffed slowly at his cigar, but did not resume.

"She is very beautiful," said Helen.

"Fascinating," Callaghan admitted.

"Good," Helen corrected.

"I know it."

"It is necessary to remember it always when we think of Ethel," said the girl.

"One could scarcely avoid it, Helen. But, she is an artist."

"And therefore impressionable?" she smiled, her eyes full of the enthusiasm of youth and hope. "Yes, you are right. But she has balance. She weighs things. We need not fear."

"Every rope has its breaking strain," Callaghan returned somewhat grimly, "and the parting sometimes kills."

"Then Ethel will never be killed," Helen announced triumphantly, "for she does not feel the strain."

They came to the music-room and glanced in. M'Gee dozed over a cigarette by the fire. Mrs M'Gee sat nursing a book of etchings considerably handed her by the colonel. Ethel and Marchmont were at the piano, Ethel singing, Marchmont improvising.

"I don't think they want us there," Callaghan decided.

Ethel's voice came out to greet them, and with it the wailing note of the violin, as Marchmont put an obligato to Taubert's haunting song—

"Es steht ein Baum in jenam Thal,  
Dar unter sass ich manchesmal  
Mit meinem Schatz allein.  
Wir sassen da so still und stumm,  
Die Blumen sah'n verwundert um  
Nach meinem Schatzelein,  
Nach meinem Schatzelein,  
Nach meinem Schatzelein."

The sad notes rang with feeling as Helen and Callaghan moved away and passed slowly up and down the terrace. And always the music floated past them, held them together, and tinged the solemn trees nestling there at the edge of the park with a light seen often in the eye of the moon. It was entrancing. The fair, strong face beside Callaghan seemed ethereal in its purity. He acknowledged its beauty but kept silence; he saw the dark eyes veiled and glancing up to meet his, but discovered no reason for response. The girl's beauty, the quiet hour, only served at that moment to point to the rashness of the woman sitting there at the piano, giving out notes which captivated Marchmont, held him in thrall, and bade him forget all other considerations. He paused after a while and faced Helen, saying almost angrily—

"Why on earth doesn't Arthur come? It is too bad. I can't understand him."

Helen glanced up at the tone, and catching a hint from his face, said, "Don't be harsh with him;" then suddenly giving rein, "Oh! I wish this trial were over. It is preying on him—absolutely sapping his strength."

This was a novel view. Hitherto Callaghan had not given it any attention, but the certitude ringing in Helen's voice made him pause. It was a new thought—one quite possible. It might easily account for his present absence. Callaghan kept silence a moment, then said, "I wonder if that is so?" and resumed his cigar.

Again they marched to and fro, Helen thinking, full of anxiety; Callaghan getting into shape this problem of being sapped by an ordeal not yet come. His vigorous mind refused to believe in such a possibility. It was feasible only at first glance, after that it became absurd.

"I think," he said at length, "that we are more likely to be sapped when it is over. Heigho! Wonder what I shall get?"

"Is either of you likely to be blamed?"

"Must be," he announced without a quaver. "Why, some of the papers were suggesting it should be made a case of manslaughter—with me, I presume, as defendant. You see," he went on, "there are big losses involved—a lot of lives. Yes, we are pretty sure to go under."

Helen glanced at the strong-knit man at her side, noted the resolute chin and clean-cut face, and shook her head. "You will never go under," she decided. "That is certain."

"I shall probably get six months," he threw out between the puffs.

"Prison!" she exclaimed in horror. "Oh, Dick!"

"No, no," Callaghan laughed, "they don't give us that sort of thing—not yet. Suspension is the word. An enforced holiday, nothing more."

"Oh," said Helen, biting her lips. Then as an afterthought, "but what about Arthur?"

"I don't know. Go free, I hope, . . . er . . . d'you mind if we change the subject, Helen? The fact is," he explained, "if one thinks too much of a thing it induces nerves. At present I have none to speak of, and, between us, I don't want any. Hallo! what are they playing now?"

"Brahm's waltzes—listen!"

They stood mute.

Violin and piano sobbed together, sobbed in valse time. The rhythm of it seemed prepared maliciously to catch men's breath and make them shiver. They moved quietly to the window and stood looking in. Marchmont faced them, but saw nothing. He was playing with closed eyes, his mobile face indicating every phase of that delicate music. He was playing with his soul, and the vibrations of the instrument explained his mood in tones that held his audience spellbound. The man was a musician to the finger-tips. With less money years ago the world would have been at his feet; but he lacked incentive. And now, it appeared, the incentive had come. In the guise of a woman, who was beautiful and could sing, this thing had happened.

Hazardously, out of the teeth of an Atlantic gale—wind roaring, seas charging,—out of the shock and jar of a collision, an incentive had been born. The voice of a woman singing in the *Sentinel's* drawing-room touched the first chord, and since then it had not ceased to vibrate.

Colonel Marchmont, so said his friends, had developed an insane appetite for practice. The fiddle and he were never apart. Work had become a necessity. Music had become a necessity—and there, slightly in the background, sat the author of this amazing change, wholly unconscious of it, playing the divine harmonies with the same thrilling touch that fell from the violin—the master-touch, the touch which marks the musician from the tyro—just a tall, rounded figure with a mass of copper-tinged hair, blue in the shadows, and a voice of perfect quality. Ethel Norris, wife of the captain of the lost *Coorong*, was the magician who had wrought this change.

M'Gee looked up when the end came and said authoritatively—

"Tell you what, Barney, you should go in for music. You and Mrs Norris play more than a little—you are in sympathy. Put it to the test. There's money in it."

Helen shivered.

"That man!" she whispered. "I shall begin to hate him."

Callaghan smiled, and Ethel, her eyes alight, her face radiant, cried out, "Oh, if we could! . . . if we could!"

"We can," said the Colonel. "We will do it. I never played before—to-night I know I played, . . . and you made me. You with your wonderful voice. Leave it to me, . . . leave it!" He pushed his fingers through his hair, bow in hand. "Ah! I forgot, you promised to do the *motif perpetuo*, . . . will you? Sure you aren't tired?"

"I could play all night," she nodded, her eyes ablaze. She struck a chord, and the violin broke into the helter-skelter rhythm without a moment's indecision—up and down, down and up, wrist tremulous, throbbing, vibrant, the man's face alive with the passion of it, the violin a soul endowed with speech.

Callaghan, pale and curiously moved, touched Helen's arm and they drew back. "We must not wait for Arthur," he said. "He will not come now. We must take her home."

Helen's face was set. She, too, owned to the fascination of this miracle, saw its danger, and decided, without allusion to it, that she was tired, and would be glad to get away.

Thus, in less than half an hour, they were again seated in the car, waving adieux, and on their way to the Cottage and Arthur.

But Arthur was not in the house when they reached it, nor was there any message explaining his absence.

Ethel tried to make light of it, remarking that it had happened before, and that doubtless they would hear in the morning. But there was a note of sadness in her voice that gave the lie to her words as they stood there grouped beside the jarring steed, wondering and ill at ease. Callaghan saw it. Indeed it was impossible to pass it by. The day for the trial approached, and with it marched the necessity for guarding Arthur. He said good-bye, therefore, with what composure he could, and started on his walk to Hamilton Square.

He was disturbed. The music had left an effect difficult to efface. The mournful character of the songs, the appealing note in that rich young voice, the marvellous

tone of that perfectly modulated obligato, had gripped him, and he was unable to shake off the influence. He desired to be alone. To think—perhaps to dream. Who can say what are precisely the emotions raised in the heart of a strong man by the blending of a beautiful voice and a beautiful form?—by the artistic rendering of a passionate song, and the pathetic figure of the singer standing alone to face a critical audience?

Marchmont, too, came in for some desultory thought. He admired Ethel—one could call it nothing less—and Ethel, alight with the glow of excited fancy, looked forward to that *début* they had spoken of in terms which had jarred. No; he desired to be alone. To think it all out, and to decide whether he had been wise in again bringing these people together.

## CHAPTER XX.

### BIRKENHEAD.

Hamilton Square is, perhaps, the one public thoroughfare in Birkenhead with any pretensions to nobility. Mean streets lead to it, mean streets take you from it; mean shops, mean lanes, mean open spaces abound beside it and around it. The streets and alleys meander anywhither. Without apparent aim they amble this way, that way, as though Authority, having discovered some germ of a notion for a town, had planned the square and placed it on a commanding eminence as the heart of the city and had left the matter of arteries and veins to chance. It seemed to suggest Authority, confronted by a sudden and unwarranted increase in ground-rents, standing rubbing its chin and saying, "Well, at all events, here shall be our square—and after that, . . . well, after that . . ." And a chorus of little townsfolk tossing out the answer, "After that the jerry-builder."



Callaghan came down the winding streets and entered the square. He walked rapidly, for it was nearly one o'clock, and the trams had ceased running. On his right was the massive Town Hall, on his left a statue of the founder of the fortunes of this conglomeration of bricks and mortar gloomily edging the river. The figure stood in marble silence, fronting the square with bared head and sorrowful eyes, as though he would say, "This I planned," and, pointing to the wilderness simmering in smoke beyond, "and this I left to those who followed me."

But Callaghan had no thought for the square or its founder, or the owner of ground-rents. His rooms lay at the far end, amidst those houses which take the westering sun, and he had decided it was time for bed. He came to the door, let himself in, and entered the sitting-room.

The lights were turned low, but a red fire glowed in the grate, and before it, bending forward, chin in hand, was Arthur Norris. Callaghan evinced no surprise at finding him thus. It seemed at that moment to be part of the scheme of things, part of the handicap in which he had become involved. He cried out cheerily, and as he crossed the bowed man glanced up to say, "Ah! you're come at last," then turned again, searching the fire with his eyes. "I'm glad," he added parenthetically.

Callaghan removed his coat and took a seat on the opposite side of the hearth.

"So this is where you have been," he said. "My dear old chap, why on earth didn't you come out with us? You have missed a treat, and given the girls no end of a shock. Gad! I think you might have hustled a little, if it was only for Ethel's sake."

"My wife," Norris returned with a touch of annoyance, "is very well able to take care of herself. I couldn't come."

The tone jarred. Callaghan felt inclined to resent it, but catching sight of the haggard face bending there in the fire-glow, refrained, and said instead—

"What is it, Arthur? Anything wrong?"

"Yes," he jerked, without looking up; "everything is wrong—everything."

"That's bad," Callaghan commented.

He crossed the room, switched up the lights, and brought whisky and seltzer, glasses, cigars, and tobacco. He sat down after mixing two portions, and took his pipe. "Try a smoke, old chap, and let me have it," he remarked. "Perhaps I can help."

Norris accepted the glass and drank a portion, but he refused the cigars. "Thanks, no," he decided. "I don't care about a smoke to-night."

"Let me know what it is, and we can have a weed afterwards," Callaghan persuaded.

The whisky seemed to pull Norris together to some degree. He moved from the attitude he had maintained hitherto and sat back holding his glass before him.

"I would give a thousand pounds," he announced suddenly, "if I had never seen the *Coorong*, if I had never gone wind-jamming,<sup>1</sup> never seen a ship. I would give every penny I ever possessed if I could re-live my life and chuck the sea and all its vagaries to the hell from which it was evolved. God made the land, the devil made the sea. God made sailors, the devil made owners. They are distinct breeds, and the tailless, God-made breed—the breed that are honest and straight and white—go under every time they move.

"No, Dick, I'm not drunk and I'm not dotty. I'm just seeing things to-night as I've never seen them before. They amaze me. They make me remember the appalling years that may be mine—mine to drift and rot, and go edgeways to the devil in. They remind me of the immutable laws of supply and demand; of the survival of the fittest, and make me see where I stand. I am remembering, too, the 'Dutchmen' who wait open-mouthed to take my position; the difficulty there will be presently. . . . Pish! you think the collision is the only thing we have to fight about; the loss of those poor devils drowned under our noses the only thing to regret, . . . my asinine conduct the one black spot—Ethel thinks it, Helen thinks it. Man, you don't know, you don't know what lies behind. I do. That is the difference.

<sup>1</sup> Nautical for a "sailing-vessel."

"To-day I got the final touch—it has brooded long, but now it is upon us, . . . and that, if you ask me, is why I did not come to the millionaire's dinner-party."

His voice rang hard and rasping. The mention of M'Gee and his tribe seemed in some way a compensation for the trouble he endured. He drank off the remainder of his liquor and placed his glass with a crash on the table, then leaned forward to push back the pieces.

"Sorry," he said, and, a little grimly, added, "no—no occasion for Highland honours to-night. The day for that is past. Remember the last time we gave Highland honours? Cape Town, Dick. You were there with troops for the front, I was there with horses from Melbourne. Remember it? It was after Paardeberg, and your people were eager for the sweeping up to begin, . . . the sweeping up! Remember it? Foot on table, . . . the clang of the band, . . . that was life. My God! Gone, all gone. Sunk in time, and now I've broken your glass over a paltry question of lawyers and plutocrats. Pish! I'm a fool."

"Never mind the glass," Callaghan returned. "Go on. I would rather you broke every stick in the place than sit there brooding with your head in your hand. Look here. Tell you what it is—you and I are in the same boat now. Trust me, and I will stand by you. There is no other course open to us. Go on. I am waiting—getting cold."

"Cold?" said Norris, with a touch of his earlier manner, "I have been blazing all day. I ran over to Liverpool this morning—didn't feel very fit, and had a baddish knock to begin with, . . . had several of 'em lately; but that isn't essential. I came down to lunch at the Bear, anyhow, and fell across young Spain for the second time. You know him—Harrod, Brocker, & Spain, my solicitors."

Callaghan nodded, and Arthur resumed—

"Well, by way of being cheerful and hopeful and giving a man some heart, he told me, first, that Flynn is in town and that your people have got hold of him; and, second, that Hooker & Sands have had notice from the mortgagees of the *Coorong*—the mortgagees mind—that they will

enter an action to recover their loss from insurance unless the amount is paid off in a certain specified time."

"So the *Coorong* was mortgaged, was she?" Callaghan remarked.

"Up to the hilt."

"Well; I suppose Hookers can pay?"

"Not a bit. The *Coorong* Limited stands on its own bottom. It is a one-ship company. Hookers are only managers, and, as far as I understand it, the *Coorong* is bankrupt unless we can get good compensation from your people. That is what we are waiting for—what I am hoping for."

Callaghan puffed meditatively at his pipe. It was not what he hoped for at all. Despite his friendship for Arthur Norris he had no desire to be on the broad of his back for the remainder of his days; and if by chance Hooker & Sands obtained substantial damages from the Western Mail Service, that would be the upshot. He removed his pipe and, looking at Arthur, said—

"Personally, of course, I hope they won't; but that is not the point. Well, in any case, I don't see how it affects you."

"You forget. I hold large shares in the *Coorong*. If the insurance goes to the mortgagees I stand to lose every penny. Every penny," he emphasised, striking his knee with one hand; "and that, you can guess, is not pleasant to look forward to."

"No; I admit it. But . . . how is it the *Coorong* was mortgaged? I thought your people were substantial."

"We are a one-ship company," Norris threw out cynically.

"But, my dear boy, they couldn't mortgage without obtaining your consent, and I take it you didn't give that?"

"I knew nothing of it; but two years ago I gave Hooker a power of attorney to act for me during my absence."

"But not to that extent, surely?" Callaghan exclaimed.

"In all matters—in everything. Hooker saw to that," Norris asserted. "It stands good. I can do nothing."

"Good God!" said Callaghan. "Have you had advice?"

"Yes."

"Sound?"

"The best."

"And what do you stand to lose?"

"About £5000."

"Yours?"

"£4000 mine, £1000 Ethel's, . . . b-r-r-r! It means selling up, old chap. The Cottage will have to go. Ethel and the kinders will have to turn out. Helen must stand on her own. . . . The damned thing has been hanging over me this month past; but to-day it came to a head. It means ruin, . . . blue ruin, dock-whalloping, stevedoring, . . . going before the stick—if we fail. And, as an offset, I'm not fit."

Callaghan stared into the fire. His pipe had gone out. He leaned forward and relighted it, saying, because he felt that Norris was looking for an answer, "Oh, but you won't fail—you can't. Steamship owners are the people who get landed, invariably. There is a bias always in favour of the sailing-ship. Cheer up. It isn't so bad as that."

He leaned back in his chair and passed a hand across his forehead. It was damp. He felt strangely moved. His friend was ruined if this thing befell. Ethel and the children would have to turn out!

By his act matters had come to this *impasse*. Ethel and the children would have to turn out! Those sweet children. That beautiful woman—Helen! He sucked at his pipe—it scarcely burned. He pressed the tobacco down with one finger and withdrew it swearing. A voice seemed to be saying again and again, "That beautiful woman. Turn out. Arthur ruined." He shook himself together and glanced at his friend. He had returned to his old attitude, chin on hands, fire-gazing. Callaghan struck a match and made a great effort with his pipe.

"Come, come," he said between the puffs. "It can't be so bad as that, . . . impossible. . . . They always drop . . . on steam . . . ships. . . . Cheer up, old boy. We shall worry . . . through. Leave the fire alone and have a smoke, eh?"

Norris moved slightly in his chair.

"The fire is my companion these times," he remarked, again with that note of bitterness. "Once I always saw pictures there—faces of beautiful women, continents awaiting discovery, castles that I might win; now I see only ruin, . . . the gaping, red ruin of that chasm, low down there between the bars, waiting to seize on the crust as it falls—to seize it, smother it, blot it from memory. Dick! I am in that chasm. The fire is all round me, the top is ready to fall, . . . b-r-r-r-r! I can't wait to see it fall." He took the poker and lunged. The fire shot up brightly. "There, it is done with. I wish to God I was done with too, . . . it would be easier to bear, Dick, . . . easier to bear."

Callaghan took a sip at his whisky and came back to prosaic questioning. He had had time to think, time to fashion his reply if the worst came.

"You say you have had advice about this Power of Attorney business, . . . whose?" he demanded.

"Harrod's."

"And he says it stands good?"

"Yes. But in any case I am bound by the action of the other shareholders. I couldn't have prevented it had I been at home. It went by vote."

"Hum, . . . and who is the mortgagee?"

"M'Gee."

"M'Gee! Sure?"

"Yes; why?"

"Oh, because M'Gee's a good sort, . . . and, . . . yes, I'll see him. My dear Arthur, don't predicate misfortune. I know M'Gee. How much does the thing mean, eh?"

"£10,000."

"A bagatelle to M'Gee. Leave it to me. I will see him."

Norris sat in silence for some minutes staring at the leaping flames. Callaghan put down his pipe and lighted a cigar. He leaned back puffing luxuriously and watching his friend's face. It was mobile, susceptible of every emotion. Now it expressed cynicism.

"An Australian friend of mine," said Norris, still looking into the fire, "is a millionaire. We had not met for years until one day I fell across him at the Melbourne Club. He was delighted to see me and called for a bottle of fiz. Then, to add zest to the meeting, he proposed that we should 'swindle' for it. He tossed. I paid."

He rose and walked moodily about the room, head bent, hands thrust deep in pocket.

"If I could do something," he cried out at length, "to prove that I am not a fool, but simply a high-strung devil with the nerves of a rabbit, I should feel happy. If! God! I might as well cry for the moon now."

"Take it easy, old chap. Bite on it. Your chance will come," Callaghan interjected, watching.

Norris halted suddenly, on fire.

"It won't!" he cried out; "it passed again the other day. I had built on it. I believed in myself despite Ethel and her talk of writing on a lower level. I had the infernal assurance to imagine that I, who have played the goat, might win my spurs in literature. But that is done with, as the other thing is done with. Publishers have got hold of my story, I suppose. They won't look at my stuff, and . . . what the devil is the use of talking?"

Again, as he moved off to pace the floor, Callaghan gave him his suggestion—"Take it easy, old chap, take it easy."

Norris halted at the edge of the rug.

"Could you take it easy in my case?" he flung out sharply.

"I would have a good try anyhow."

A cynical smile dawned on the strained face. "I forgot," came the words, blurted, irascible, "*you* would not have to try. It is inborn. The man who can stand cool under fire is a type apart. When I am under fire I *am* fire. Useless, eh? Most condemnable state of affairs—born in part of my heroic ancestry, in part acquired by training, in part by malaria and harebrained episodes in under-manned wind-jammers for the benefit of millionaire shipowners. The whole gamut of idiocy, eh, what?"

He marched again, up and down the stuffy room, beating

with his feet on carpets worn by the feet of countless lodgers, battling with this phase which seemed to him so monstrous, so unendurable; yet not a word of his interview with the doctor or of his hallucination passed his lips. Only the causes which led to it. And to them, apparently, had been added the final sorrow of a rejected masterpiece.

Callaghan gathered this from the jerkily spoken sentences, but he was powerless to advise. He knew nothing of the difficulties of publication. He knew only that his friend suffered, and threw out a suggestion.

"Have you told Ethel about this?"

"Ethel? No; why should I?"

"It seems her due."

"And would add to her worries, eh?"

Callaghan smoked in silence.

"If," said Norris, halting a moment beside him, "I could have gone to her and told her the thing was accepted, I should have done so quickly. That is what I lived for. But Ethel and I differ on questions of literary value. Ethel is practical, like you. I am a dreamer. Let it pass. . . ."

He walked again.

Three o'clock sounded from a landing where a cuckoo bobbed strenuously announcing the passage of time.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### COORONG V. SENTINEL.

There was fog in the Mersey valley, fog lying over the hills, fog simmering amidst the shipping struggling in the estuary. There was fog everywhere about the marshy solitudes at the edge of the land—clean, white fog; but over the grey cities, sloping up from the turbid river, a bank of smoke and smuts and steam lay yellow and sullen.



And through it came the voices of the shipping afloat in the murk.

The glass was high, the air carbon, the mud thick. Outside Formby incoming vessels reported clear weather, bright sunshine, and no wind. Within the smoke-grimed towns newspapers reported a period of anti-cyclonic pressure; and business men, debarred of their favourite promenade on the ferries, forced into the crammed lifts and subways of the electric railway, called it a period of damnable smells. Men anathematised it without stint; but they all owned chimneys—some making money, others simply burning it; some taller than others, some more poisonous. Therefore the smoke remained, and mankind took refuge in swear-words elaborately coined to fit the emergency.

Callaghan and Norris boarded the ferry at Woodside. The Mersey tube was swifter, more certain of scheduled arrival; but the man who is accustomed to the waterways of the world prefers them at all times. He understands what he faces there, but is not easy on the question of possible "short circuits," which, as far as he can comprehend it, generally spells incineration.

So they started to face their trial, these two friends, on one of the broad-beamed and aldermanic prowlers that glide so magically between Woodside and the landing-stage, and presently found themselves listening to the twin notes of warning bellowing overhead. "Wi-r-r-r-r-r! Wi-r-r-r-r-r!" said the horn, "I am under way, trying to cross. Look out!"

The pistons bobbed masterfully in clouds of steam, and the *Alderman* moved onward, like her prototype—nose in air.

A peasoup river swirled out of a peasoup distance. The ships, the tugs, the piers vanished; and in place of them came cries, boos, hootings, and the tinkling of bells. They were afloat on an unclean sea, breathing unclean air, and listening to the babel of voices that pierced it. Here a cargo-boat pushing slowly up-stream, and shouting the fact on a sirene; there a hopper making for the sea, and booing hoarsely of her advent; here a Manchester-

man, squat, short-masted, a warehouse in the guise of a steamship, and howling like a giant cat in search of his mate; there a dredger solemnly sucking at the river's bed, stirring the peasoup water, peasoup gushing from her side, her traps, throbbing, a-hum with prisoned energy, and advertising her presence on a little shrill bell—ting, ting, ting, ting—like a baby with a new-found rattle it cannot forget. Here, too, came a tug fussily churning the water to foam, and hooting merrily of the salvage she awaited; there, in the bight, were a bunch of anchored barges—canal-men, Runcorn-men, Salt Union lighters, men from the dim reaches far up amidst the smoke and blare of factory buzzers—all busily throbbing, pushing up, pushing down, sidling a little this way, edging a trifle that: hazardously making their "Saturday night," and providing dividends for the owners of mines, the owners of chimneys, the owners of furnaces; for the railway kings, the dock kings, and all the world of magnates who control the destinies of a great city and live out of it.

The two friends stood peering into the fog, and noting the nonchalant demeanour of the helmsman. A fog was nothing new, nothing amazing. He advertised the fact by a gaze as placid as the moon at full. He stamped to keep warm—that, apparently, was the object of his dismal attitude. They drew near the stage, and heard its presence announced by a bell; they moved more slowly, still in the peasoup element, and gathered the fact that they were too far up. Twin propellers, answering a gong, churned methodically to remedy the defect. They crept past an anchored coaster, looking shorn and miserable, like a ghost caught napping in daylight, and came down to the pontoon with a thump and a flutter of racing screws. Some one shouted from the peasoup land, another answered from the peasoup deck, a clang announced the gangway had fallen, and the passengers, emerging from their shelter, marched from the peasoup *Alderman* to the peasoup stage, and vanished in the throat of a bridgeway steeped in peasoup.

Callaghan and Norris moved on, joined a car which came plunging out of the murk, and sat until a man

opened the far door to say in a tone of truculent apathy—"George's 'All." Then they rose, passed between the lane of knees, and reached the street.

St George's Hall loomed grey and misty, high in the fog.

"I hear," said Callaghan, as they mounted the steps, "that the stipendiary is ill, and so we are going before the amateurs. Did you know?"

"Yes. What does it matter, . . . in other towns they always go before the amateurs—what would you have? We are only sailors, and in any case it is better than waiting. Anything is better than waiting, eh?"

"I don't know. Hum! keep your grip, old chap. Don't let them rag you."

Norris threw out his arm—"To the devil with the whole crew!" he apostrophised brazenly. "I care nothing. But I shall make some of them sit up."

Behind the tone there lurked the nervous, excitable manner, the difficulty of maintaining self-control, even at this distance. Callaghan saw it and pressed his friend's arm. "Mind, I rely on you. Don't fail me," he persuaded, and Norris jerkily tossed the answer—"Never fear."

It was typical of these two that neither had much to say; that of them Callaghan was calm and Norris wrathful; that as they emerged from the fog in the street, and paused in the fog at the head of the steps, within the grim portal of that monochrome Hall which stands as Liverpool's masterpiece, they gripped hands, saying nothing. It was typical, too, of the trial they faced, that it loomed in their imagination as a fog—dense as the atmosphere from which they drew breath, as little understood as the force lighting the building which sheltered them.

But Norris was concerned wholly with the fact that Flynn was in Liverpool, that he had been unable to discover him, and that in all probability he would have to face him now at the courts for the first time.

For this reason he had given Ethel and Helen no hint of when the trial was to take place, and for this reason,

too, he had almost lived at Callaghan's rooms since the night of the dinner. The littleness of it all—the childishness! A man who once had been firm of touch, resolute, resourceful,—it was amazing. To Callaghan, who had known him otherwise, it was tragedy. But Norris saw nothing of this. He saw himself degraded, forced to stand trial, like a common malefactor before magistrates, for a fault that was no fault: for an error that not one in a thousand would have avoided. It was bitter. The position galled. But the thing which appealed to him was the personal degradation to which he was exposed by the fact of Flynn's presence. The Norrises who had gone before—his sires—had fought for their country, and died smiling. Their descendant squirmed at the notion of legal argument.

Self-love, wounded honour, the knowledge of his own impossible cowardice, had him by the throat; had brought him at this supreme juncture to forget the more tragic issue dependent on this trial, and to forget, too, the subtle cause which had dragged him, a man of strong endurance, to this loquacious, equivocating, and excitable epitome of himself. A man afflicted with a torrent of opinions, leaping at conclusions and weighing none.

Well, he stood there, a pitiable enough object, with Callaghan at his side: stood there glinting at the door, furtively watching the passers, starting, downcast, irascible, until from within there came the sound of moving footsteps, the stir of a court rising on the completion of a case, and the doors fell open. Some one was saying in a heavy monotone—“*Coorong v. Sentinel*,” as though it were a prayer, and from the passages and hall came answering petitions—“*Coorong v. Sentinel*.” It sounded like a dirge.

Norris and Callaghan had shaken hands. Now they were to fight. The shorn one sings in the face of the robber, but these two were not yet shorn. They entered with solemn faces.

Before them as they moved in was a bustling crowd of lawyers, barristers, and clerks, all busily packing papers, books; loading and unloading cavernous blue bags, and

talking in subdued tones. Behind them, and slightly raised from the body of the court, was the Bench, whereon sat the magistrates, and on either hand a pair of prompters, emancipated men of the sea, as nautical assessors.

They were totally unlike, these assessors. One smart, grey-whiskered, red and jolly; the other saturnine, long-jawed, black-bearded, unimaginative. The one carrying the hall-mark of a commander in Green's, the other of a climb from the ranks in Trampdom.

Beneath the trio of magistrates was another prim gentleman, resting with elbows on the table he faced—the magistrates' clerk, a personage whose duty it was to prompt on points of law. They shuffled in their seats, these judges of devil-may-care sailors who got into collision and came there to be cleared. One yawned, the other lounged, for the day was heavy, productive of lethargy,—but the chairman sat erect, obviously a person who would stand little prompting. He was large, massive of limb and chin, with fat fingers liberally circled with rings, straight lips, and a bristling frown. A man who was generally supposed to have lifted himself from the masses to the classes by distributing goods in shops called "Stores." The colonel, on his right, abhorred him; the managing partner in a huge concern, on his left, considered him a giant.

On every hand, as Callaghan and Norris passed to their places, was an eddy tide of frock-coated business men, watchers, nautical personages, policemen, witnesses, clerks, all passing in or passing out, settling themselves for this action of *Coorong v. Sentinel*. Then came a cry from the usher, and it was seen that Lindley Harrold, Norris's lawyer, was on his feet addressing the Court.

"This is a matter, your worships," he remarked in a rapid undertone, "arising out of a collision between the sailing-ship *Coorong*, homeward bound from Australia, and the mail steamer *Sentinel*, outward for New York. Now, I do not propose at this moment to go deeply into the question of conditions and so forth, but will state roundly what, I believe, my friend admits—namely,

that on the night of the fifteenth of October, when off Fastnet . . ."

"Fastnet—Fastnet—what's that?" questioned the chairman.

"Rock, your worship—off the Irish coast."

"Ah, yes—precisely. A lighted rock, I suppose?"

"Just so. Leading light. Usual place for a landfall," blurted the rosy one, assessor, late of Green's. "Pass his worship a chart."

The chairman acknowledged this suggestion by taking no notice of it. Landfall was for him, perhaps, landslide or landslip. He frowned and bowed to Harrod, who proceeded—

"When off Fastnet, on the night of the 15th of October, the *Sentinel* struck the *Coorong* a heavy blow just abaft the beam, and sank her in four minutes. That is admitted. There is no question about it at all—but, there is the question of culpability, the question of seaworthiness, and in order to decide this latter point which has been introduced, as we think, somewhat gratuitously, I call Mr Hooker, the managing owner of the *Coorong*."

A ponderous man, wearing a heavy fob over a bulging waistcoat, rose at the solicitors' table, and was taken to the box and sworn.

"You are the managing director of this firm?"

"I am."

"You managed the *Coorong*, and saw her prior to her departure on the last voyage?"

"Yes."

"Was she well found and seaworthy in every respect?"

"Certainly," the fob trembled at the suggestion. "Certainly."

"She was an iron ship, I think?"

"Steel."

"Precisely. The more modern format—a—now as to her equipment . . . side lights, sails, gear, boats, and so forth, what condition were they in when she left Liverpool?"

"Absolutely first-rate."

"You have no doubt in your mind on that head?"

"None whatever."

"And the ship was comparatively a new one—dating '92, I think, and constructed to the latest requirements of the Board of Trade?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

Lindley Harrod turned to the chairman. "I have called the managing director first in this matter, because I understand the question of equipment will be raised at once, and we desire to court it." He settled his gown, looked about him, and sat down.

Instantly there rose Richard Bannerman of Jasset, Jasset, Bannerman, & Jowl, Callaghan's defenders—a man with a nose. He stood negligently with one foot in the seat of his chair, an elbow resting on his knee, and applied himself at once to the matter in hand.

"What kind of side-lights did the *Coorong* carry?" he asked laconically of the fob.

"Oh, the usual kind, . . . in accordance with regulation."

"Dioptric?" an assessor put in.

"I don't remember."

"No records, eh? Hum! were they cheap lamps?" Bannerman persisted.

"Certainly not."

"Did you not buy them second-hand in the Goree? And is it not a fact that the burners were damaged, and the green glass cracked?"

"They were passed by the Board of Trade, sir, and I have no memory for cracks," Hooker fumed.

"I suggest to you," the lawyer put in blandly, "that the lights were inefficient."

"In that case the onus lies with the Board of Trade," Hooker announced from behind a purpling visage. "The lamps were passed by their surveyor before the ship sailed. I don't see what it has to do with the case. . . . I consider the imputation monstrous," he spluttered.

"Consider the facts, sir, and never mind the Board of Trade," said Bannerman sternly. "Fifteen persons were drowned. Your vessel was seen only five minutes before

she was struck, and in view of it I ask you again—are you satisfied that these lights were the best that could be bought for money?”

“Yes—I am. They were good lights. They were not copper-cased lights, but they were good, and had a visibility far in excess of the distance as required by the Board of Trade—two miles.”

“You rely on the Board of Trade?”

“I find it safe.”

“And you consider two miles sufficient range?”

“I have no option. It is the regulation.”

“I put it to you, sir—are not vessels of the *Coorong's* type usually fitted with lights having a range of four, five, and even six miles?”

“I can't say. I know they must be passed by the Board of Trade. My captains have never made any sort of complaint.”

“None of your vessels are fitted with these lights, I suppose?” came the question, direct, refusing to be dragged into the hazy manœuvring of a company's office.

“They are fitted with lights sanctioned by the Board of Trade.”

“I see,” said Bannerman as he sank into his place, “you have learned your lesson well.”

Lindley Harrod rose at this and poured oil on the troubled waters. He put a few suggestions to the ship-owner and elicited the fact that he was an extremely nervous man, particularly sensitive to his crew's welfare, and that in no case could he profit by the loss of the *Coorong*, seeing that vessel was only partly insured. And having done this, Harrod called Arthur Norris, asked some docile questions, and left him to cross-examination.

“Were you satisfied with the side-lights supplied to the *Coorong*?” Bannerman threw out as he rose to confront the new witness.

“Yes.”

“You have seen better?”

“I have seen worse.”

“Not much worse, I suppose?”

“It depends on where you draw the line.”



"Where do you draw it, Captain?"

"High up. Very high. On our side-lights we have to rely. I have no complaint to make about them."

Bannerman turned abruptly from the topic and launched a new one. "You were on deck at the time of the collision—and were, I presume, in command?" He searched this man with his eyes, noting the high-strung type, the nervous manner.

"Yes."

"Any one with you?"

"My second mate."

"Name, please?"

"Flynn—I don't know his Christian name."

"It is immaterial, at present. Where is he?"

"I can't say. He left the *Sentinel* in New York."

"And you don't much care if you never see him again, eh, Captain Norris?"

No answer.

The chairman perceived something in the background and instantly decided to have it out. "You hear the question, sir?" he remarked. "Have the goodness to reply to it."

Harrod bobbed up. "Pardon, your worship. I object to the question. It is immaterial."

Bannerman waived the point. "Well," he said, "I have no intention of pressing it. I leave the Court to gather their own inference."

Again Harrod bobbed up. "That is an unfair remark, your worship. I must ask for its withdrawal."

The chairman paused, drummed on the desk, and the magistrates' clerk rose to speak quietly to the great face leaning towards him. Then the chairman cleared his throat. "Huh!" he said, "huh! . . . as a matter of fact it is irrelevant."

"And I," Bannerman bowed, "have no hesitation in withdrawing it." He turned to Norris again and said easily, "Now, sir, what about this collision of yours? You tell me you were in command, and that you had with you a second mate, Flynn, who has vanished. How was it that the collision occurred?"

"The *Sentinel* swept up in the rain, and before anything could be done she had cut us in two," Norris blurted.

"Anything could be done—by whom?"

"Either of us."

"Ah! you admit you would have attempted to avoid collision then?"

"Certainly, providing the steamer did not."

"I see. But you did nothing?"

Norris paused. The crux of the whole business lay in his answer to this. If he admitted that he had altered his course, the *Coorong* would be held to blame; if he denied it, he stood in danger of being confronted with Flynn, with the inevitable final clause in the regulation governing collisions which bade him do a thing which before it had ordained he might not do.

The clause he could face at a pinch, but Flynn he could not face. He was the man who had blurted his shame and left him handicapped even at this supreme juncture by his idiot ravings. He was the man whom his opponents only held out of sight to produce at the psychological moment. Flynn . . . Pish! This matter was the crux the touchstone. By some chance, owing to Flynn he presumed, the *Sentinel's* people had got hold of it. It would be absurd to deny it in these conditions. Norris looked up and found Bannerman eyeing him: relentless, masterful, a man of subtle depths, perfectly practised in the art of throwing mud, darts, matter that would stick—and heard him say, "Come, sir; I am waiting," and boldly took the plunge.

"The position was a difficult one," he remarked, the nervous tension evident in his eyes, in his whole demeanour. "According to the regulation I was bound to 'stand on,' . . . but . . ."

"Yes, yes, . . . but what did you do?" Bannerman tapped out.

"It became apparent to me that the steamer did not see us—and in these circumstances it became my duty, by regulation, to avoid collision if possible, . . . and . . ."

"Will you kindly tell the Court what you did, sir?"

came bitingly from the lawyer's lips. "Never mind explanation. What did you *do*?"

"I starboarded. Having regard to the fact that the steamer did not appear to . . ."

The chairman looked down on this man, caught in the toils, and said with a Solomon-like air, "If you will just answer questions and try to avoid explanations, I think we shall be more likely to get on."

"Explanations are essential at this juncture, your worship," Norris threw out. "I am ordered by the Regulations to do one thing in certain eventualities, and another thing in others. I . . ."

The chairman turned to the saturnine assessor and said, "Perhaps you can give us some light, Captain Whitley, for I confess I am becoming involved."

"A steamer," said Captain Whitley, "always keeps out of a sailing-ship's way. The sailing-ship must keep her course and speed. That is essential."

"Ha! I see. Precisely. Quite right too—quite right," said the chairman, pursing his lips.

"But if," said the voice of the man who had ruled in Green's—"but if the steamer does not get out of the way, then it becomes the duty of the sailing-ship to avoid collision at all hazards."

The chairman considered this new point frowningly, then bent forward to say, "Yes, yes. Of course. But the sailing-ship must be sure the steamship does not intend to get out of the way before she does anything, I presume?"

"Precisely—but it is a difficult point."

"I see no difficulty," said the man of steam. "The regulation is ample, clear, precise. Article twenty-one says—'Where, by any of these rules, one of two vessels is to keep out of the way, the other shall keep her course and speed.' That, sir, is distinct."

"True, true," came the voice of jollity, "but article twenty-seven says, 'In obeying and construing these rules, due regard shall be had to all dangers of navigation and collision, and to any special circumstances which may render a departure from the above rules necessary in order

to avoid immediate danger,' and that, I take leave to suggest, covers the witness's case—if he did alter his course."

The chairman raised his hand—a fat, ring-bedizened hand, and said, "As far as I can understand the matter, it lies with us, gentlemen,"—he looked at his twin supporters,—“to settle this matter on the basis of common-sense. It is a matter on which, apparently, the assessors do not agree. It is a matter in which the premises appear to be misleading. I see only one thing,”—he turned to Norris, who had remained an interested spectator of this colloquy, and said, “Were you certain the steamship did not intend to avoid you?”

“I thought she did not see us, and . . .”

“Answer my question, sir—yes or no,” came gruffly from the controller of stores.

Norris's face grew crimson. He was angry. He decided that it was patent on which side this man stood. He was choleric, accustomed to command, a man of breeding—the whole thing stank in his nostrils, and he leaned forward, saying hotly—

“I am not here to be bullied or driven. I protest against your tone, sir, and I do not know that I am called upon to reply.”

The chairman sat puffing cheeks slowly losing their tinge. The outburst was so unexpected. He scarcely recognised its full meaning before Colonel Blackburn, the magistrate on his left, interposed, saying quietly—

“I fancy, perhaps, Captain Norris would have no objection to withdraw that remark, if it is pointed out to him that it is irregular. In fact, I am sure he will. I think, too, in all deference to you, sir,” he bowed to the chair, “that a matter which is debatable even among experts,” he suggested by a motion of his hand the two assessors, “is one on which at all events a witness should not be—I was going to say badgered, but I substitute hastened.”

The cultured and unimpassioned tone acted like a sedative on Norris. He perceived that there was one, at least, of his own stamp there, and before Harrod could add his petition to the chair, said—

"If I have made any remark that is unusual or impertinent to the office your worship fills, I withdraw it unhesitatingly."

The chairman sat forward, examining this rather truculent witness who ventured to criticise his methods, and said in his company meeting voice,—

"And we, sir, accept your apology in the spirit in which it is made; not because we doubt our authority, or our powers, but because we would not have it said that a representative of English law failed in the smallest particle in magnanimity."

The fat voice droned the words with the unction of a priest forgiving sins, but to Norris they sounded trivial, unimportant—words to be forgotten as soon as heard.

A small stir at the back of the court as the chairman ceased had caused Norris to look round, and he saw Ethel with Helen and Colonel Marchmont entering. The intrusion annoyed him. It appeared impossible to shake himself free of these petticoats and their guardian, the "feminine interests," and all the bag-o'-tricks, so the thing framed itself in his mind, even here in court. A court was no place for women—especially when a husband is on trial—he decided mentally. But the modern women have no compunction. They crowd, as the children crowd round slaughter-houses, to see men stuck—to hear their squeals, to dip their soft white hands in their blood. Pish! The whole phase was abominable. But him they should not hear squeal. He was fighting . . . fighting, . . . and with the thought came a breath of that rain-splashed night off Fastnet, a note of the wind-roar, a recollection of the mad curvetting of the counter-wave rolling to leeward, and throwing back his head he said,—

"The position was intricate. It was one of delicate and interwoven acts and thoughts." The sound of his voice lelighted him; he threw out his hand: "I cannot attempt to give you a notion of the difficulty," he expatiated. "To understand it a man must have been at sea as I have since I left the *Worcester*—must have been through gale and calm, and learned their attitudes as I have learned them."

Harrod half rose to interfere, but Norris went on as though inspired, his face pale, his eyes hard,—

"We were coming home—do you understand what that means? • As we drew near, a gale rushing us, the rain began to fall. At two o'clock the night was black—black, and only the gleam of phosphorescence lay in the waters on either hand. It was a night of danger—but danger is always beside the ship whether she moves or whether she stops: so she moves. Then, out of the murk came the roar of the *Sentinel's* whistle—hooting. We could not see her. We heard her, and presently we saw her lights. But until the last moment we supposed she saw us, and waited for her to • give way. How far her lights were visible I cannot say, or how far ours. I have no doubt the *Sentinel* would have acted sooner had she seen us. As it was, I had to act. I put my helm up—ported, in effect; and at the last moment, as if a Nemesis were dodging us, the *Sentinel* starboarded. Then nothing could save us. She passed over us as though we had been built of dust."

Helen glanced at Marchmont, her eyes full of suppressed excitement, and whispered, "Splendid. Poor Arthur!" and heard the Colonel's laconic comment—"Suicide"—without comprehension. She told herself it was magnificent, and longed to be able to congratulate the speaker. She bent forward to catch his eye.

Harrod, leaning forward also, wrung his hands, desiring to say something to the speaker who had so suddenly waxed eloquent, but said not a word. To interfere, to suggest discretion, seemed, perhaps, more dangerous with this high-strung witness than to sit and hear him talk. He could speak too. On another occasion Harrod would have listened with pleasure—but now! Well, it was madness—fatal. And, as he had anticipated, Baunerman, still on his feet, noting points and reading his man like a book, sprang upon him with—

"You say it was raining—what sort of rain?"

"Thin, driving rain."

"Pretty dense, I suppose?"

"Yes; a black night."

"What canvas were you under?"

"All plain sail."

"Speed?"

"Perhaps eleven or twelve knots."

The lawyer stood a moment with half-closed eyes, tapping with his pince-nez on a bent knee. "I wonder, Captain Norris," he remarked casually, "whether you have ever read the first paragraph of article sixteen?"

"I have. I know every line."

"Then why did you not act up to it?"

"Because, sir, a sailing-ship is not under command with reduced canvas."

"Ah—so?" Bannerman sank slowly to his seat. "As far as I can comprehend it, your worship, it is the Regulations which are at fault," he suggested, "and not Captain Norris."

Ethel sat at the back of the court, her gaze fixed, her eyes bright. For a moment, while her husband spoke, she had thrilled as of old at the sound of his voice; but now, as the lawyer's deductions fell upon her, the new calm prevailed, the calm which is sometimes called heartlessness, and arrives from a balancing of events—actions, *pro* and *con*—and distributing their weight in accurate measure. Arthur was losing. He had no right to make admissions. He had no right to throw obloquy on the Regulations. By them he would be judged. He should fight squarely as those other men fought—without giving a loophole, without quarter, mercilessly.

She wondered what would follow this adroit move, whether Harrod would say anything; but no one interfered, nothing happened. Norris left the box and crossed to a seat at the solicitor's table, sitting with head buried.

Helen touched her arm. "I am afraid," she whispered. "I wish we hadn't come. Poor Arthur!"

"I am glad we came," Ethel's calm voice assured her. "But a man should fight—not . . ." she shrugged her shoulders, remembering the attitude, recognising that as far as could be guessed her husband was beaten. She turned to Colonel Marchmont—"Who is that note from?" she asked.

"Callaghan. Read it."

She took the small paper which a few minutes before had been brought round by a clerk and held it to the light.

"Afraid Norris has made a hash of it," so ran the words in Callaghan's firm writing; "admits he made a blunder—in effect, I must fight for my own hand now, or there will be a pair of us stranded.—R. C."

She returned the note without a word. "I must fight for my own hand *now*," echoed in her brain. What, then, had been his intention before? She asked the question unwittingly. Would he have taken the blame—would it have been possible? and if so . . .

Her attention was arrested by Bannerman's voice, and she glanced up to see Callaghan in the witness-box, calm, strong, unperturbed. Two or three questions sufficed, then the lawyer sat down, and Harrod rose to commence his cross-examination.

"Were you on the bridge at the time of the collision?"

"I was on the bridge all night."

"You did not leave it at all?"

"No."

"*Ham*—what time was it when you first saw the *Coorong's* lights?"

"Two-fifteen—midwatch."

"Certain?"

"Quite."

"And at what time did the collision occur?"

"Two-twenty."

"How do you know—do you carry a stop-watch to mark intervals of this sort?"

"No. A junior officer takes the time and logs it."

"And you are prepared to swear to it?"

"The officer will."

Harrod fussed with his notes, and came back to the issue. Already, in his mind, he had decided that Captain Callaghan would be difficult.

"What kind of weather was it?" he questioned again.

"Dirty."

"Anything unusual?"

"Atlantic weather."



"I see—and at what speed was the *Sentinel* going when you sighted the *Coorong*?"

"Half-speed."

"How long had you been at half-speed, Captain?"

"Since twelve o'clock—since the rain made it thick."

"Oh, it was thick?"

"It was raining."

"You swear that your engines were at half-speed?"

"I swear it."

"Be careful, sir. Remember you are on your oath."

"I am not likely to forget it."

Harrod looked at the calm, clear-cut face, and, throwing back his gown to free an arm, said, "It is within our knowledge that mail steamers of the type you command ring the engine-room telegraph to slow or half-speed, and send written instructions to the engineer to keep going at full-speed. It is the ordinary practice. Speed must be kept up if greyhounds are to break the record—come, you know it as well as I do. Very well, I put it to you that the *Sentinel's* engines were not at half-speed, no matter what the dial showed."

"A commander who puts himself in the engineer's power in the way you suggest is a fool," Callaghan commented, smiling.

"Is it not done, sir?"

"It may be. I have no knowledge."

"I suggest it was the case on your ship!"

"And I," Callaghan replied with a stern inflection, "have no hesitation in telling you it is a lie."

"I warn you. I have proof," Harrod reiterated vehemently.

"Very well, sir, produce it," came from Callaghan's firm lips.

But Harrod was not prepared to produce it. He knew that it would be unwise. He knew that the evidence of a stoker discharged for drunkenness and insubordination was not precisely the kind of evidence he must win on. He had used the suggestion as a threat, merely to see its effect. He had no hesitation in assuming that the Bench would accept Callaghan's and his officers' testimony, and

that the stoker would be turned against him. No,—he faced about, not a whit perturbed, and attacked a new issue.

"For the moment," he said, "we will accept your version, Captain. You say your engines were at half-speed. What is half-speed?"

"Ten or eleven knots."

"An equivalent of the *Coorong's* speed under all plain sail, that my friend made such a point of. Come. This is interesting. Do you consider ten or eleven knots a safe speed for a dark night in the thick of traffic, with rain and a gale of wind blowing?"

"Eminently."

"Joking aside, sir."

"I am not joking. The matter is too serious."

"But in this case it was unsafe, you admit that, Captain Callaghan?"

"I admit nothing,—but even in this case," Callaghan remarked in the even tones of one who knows precisely how to handle his subject, "it would have been safe had the *Coorong* kept her course."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"I take it that if you had been going at less speed, your ship would not have been under control," Harrod insinuated.

"I have not said so."

"It is a matter of common knowledge, sir."

"In some ships possibly, but not with us."

With infinite patience Harrod faced about playing his losing game. Callaghan and he were perhaps the coolest men in court, but the lawyer knew that after the admissions made by Norris he had no chance. He leaned forward, and taking some models, passed them up to the witness. "Take these," he said, "and show their worships how you would have got your ship out of the very tight corner you were in, without injury to the *Coorong*."

Callaghan smiled. The thing was child's play to a man of his experience. He glanced up and caught Ethel and Helen watching intently, and for an instant a thrill ran

through him, lest they should misunderstand and misjudge him. But with the cold, painted models in hand the feeling speedily passed, and he set himself to prove his point. He spoke rapidly, in clear short sentences—manipulating the models.

"The *Sentinel* was here, steering west, magnetic; the *Coorong* there, steering, I believe, N.  $45^{\circ}$  E., also magnetic. When I saw the *Coorong* first she was showing the green light on our port-bow, and I immediately starboarded, and went full speed astern on my port engine. From the time I saw the green light until we struck her was five minutes. Our united speed I think I may take at twenty knots, and we were drawing together at an angle of about  $130^{\circ}$ . At twenty knots we would together have travelled rather less than two miles. But I make you a present of the difference, and will call it two miles. Now, sir, the problem is simplicity itself. A nautical mile is 6086.7 feet, two miles is 12,173.4 feet, and the *Sentinel's* perimeter, under the conditions I have named, 1500 feet."

He twisted the models into position on a graduated board, and stood back. "In other words," he resumed without hesitation, "if the *Coorong* had kept her course when I starboarded, we should not have come near her."

The board and the models were passed up to the assessors, who, with the magistrates, had been interested spectators of this problem.

"Cutting it rather fine, Captain Callaghan?" Harrod suggested.

"No—considering the conditions, I do not think so."

"Can you account for being so close before seeing the *Coorong's* lights?" Harrod persisted.

"I don't attempt to account for it. It happened."

"I suggest that your lookout was defective."

"If their worships take that view, I am to blame."

"You don't take that view?"

"Naturally I do not."

"Are you aware, sir, that, in this collision you attempt to defend by means of mathematical calculations, fifteen persons were drowned, and that there are between forty

and nitty left destitute—dependents lacking bread in consequence?"

"I am aware of it, and, if it is of any use saying so, I regret it."

"Oh, you do regret it?"

"It is a scene I shall never forget," Callaghan announced steadily. "It is one I do not care to talk about."

Harrod resumed his seat.

There was no trapping this man, no possibility of flustering him. His nerves were of steel, his intuition keen, his answers crisp and to the point. Harrod reluctantly admitted, as he sat down, that he had gained nothing by cross-examination—nothing to place as equipoise against Norris's fatal admissions.

Other witnesses appeared and added their little quota of evidence; but no fresh matter was adduced, nothing pertinent. The *Sentinel* was able to corroborate Callaghan's statements by the sworn testimony of the crew—otherwise it was at the end as it had been in the beginning, a duel between the captains. Flynn, although in court, by some marvellous good fortune Bannerman did not call. Perhaps, like Harrod with his stoker, he considered it wise to efface him.

And so, at five o'clock on the evening of this foggy day, Harrod rose to address a Bench which had manifestly made up its mind, with the knowledge that he could say little to alter it. But he was a man of parts, and not easily beaten. He struck at once the sole remaining defence, avoiding the evidence as though it were tainted, plague-ridden.

"I feel," he said, "that a very heavy responsibility rests on me in this matter. As the case stands in my mind, your worships, it is full of pathos, full of the strenuousness which is so appalling, when to mar it all comes tragedy. Here we have a young officer, a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve, homeward bound from Melbourne, and within sight, so to speak, of the Motherland. He loves that land. Inch by inch, mile by mile, he has fought his way over sea, and has come into the storm-swept zone surrounding it.

And here, by the dirigence of chance, he meets forces altogether beyond and outside his control.

"I submit, sir, that in a case of this kind an officer has a right to expect plain directions from those who frame the laws. I submit that he has a right to demand that the regulations which are made for his guidance, and by which he is tried and sometimes condemned, shall be beyond quibble, beyond argument—shall, in point of fact, be plain, unassailable instructions. That is not the case here; for, as the nautical assessors have shown, we are confronted by two distinct sets of orders, both governing the case. According to the first, it is the duty of a sailing-ship when meeting a steamer to maintain her course and speed; according to the other, it is ordained that in the event of the steamer not obeying the rule, the sailing-ship must take the law into her own hands and avoid collision at all hazards.

"Very well. This is what my client did. The steamship came on, as he says, 'hooting on her whistle, without making the smallest attempt to avoid us,' and, 'in these circumstances, it devolved upon us to avoid him, and we did the only thing left open to us—we put our helm up, ported, and tried to get across his bows.'

"Now I do not suppose authority, when it decided an alternative was necessary, intended that the defaulter should take refuge in the enactment which had been rendered ineffective by his lack of promptitude; nor do I imagine for one moment that it would be so interpreted by authority. Therefore I feel I can leave this point in your worships' hands, with the full knowledge that you will accept my view of the case.

"Very well. Now we pass to another aspect. Very great stress has been laid by my friend upon the fact that the *Coorong* was not seen by the *Sentinel* until five minutes before she was struck—until, in effect, the *Coorong* had put her helm up. It has been contended that the side-lights were ineffective, or that they were badly cared for by the people of the *Coorong*. With the first point I have nothing to do, except to say, in passing, that the lamps

were passed by the Board of Trade's Inspector, and therefore we may take it they were good lamps. But as regards the second contention, I do not think it will hold water.

"Is it conceivable, sir, that men who are entering Channel in the teeth of a gale of wind, would neglect their one safeguard? Is it conceivable, even supposing for the moment that the captain and officers neglected to ascertain whether the lamps were burning brightly, that the men, and the man on the look-out especially, would neglect them? Sir, it is inconceivable. More, I say distinctly here, that the crew, or the individual, who would act in such a manner, could not be anxious to reach home, but to commit suicide. The suggestion is absurd. It will not hold water.

"There may sometimes be negligence, but not in the teeth of a gale of wind: there may sometimes be laxity, but not when men are approaching Channel. This Channel is the highway of nations, the street of modern times, and is thronged, as are our streets of Liverpool, with passers moving hitherward, thitherward; crossing, meeting, overtaking each other, all bent on affairs outside the ken of others. I say that in this case it is inconceivable that men should neglect what is obviously their one safeguard, and I have yet to hear the evidence which will support it.

"Note the conditions, sir. I know them, and I ask you to balance them well in your minds. 'A gale of wind was at our heels, and after twelve o'clock rain. A black night.' A night when men do not turn in, or if they turn in do so 'all standing,' and ready for an immediate response to orders.

"Here, on the one hand, is our vessel, a delicate, snow-clad sailing-ship, swinging solemnly over sea; there, in the black mask we are approaching, a steel liner: a thing of immense power, of solid construction, a monster able to carry us comfortably on her saloon deck. Her lights are visible to us. Her whistle booms in our ears. We watch her gradual approach—and, is it conceivable, we do not

attempt to make our presence known? We are limited by authority as to what we may do; we are given absurd instruments with which to shout of our presence—archaic, Noah-like instruments; but we use them, bray with them at the top of our voice. We go forward, I say, and see to our lights; we take our one instrument, our archaic fog-horn, and tootle of our presence. To imagine us capable of neglect in these circumstances is inconceivable. Sir, it is beyond all words ridiculous. It suggests that we have no desire to reach home; that we have contemplated barratry, that we are tired of life and anxious to scuttle through the first door we find open.”

Harrod flung back his gown and stood a moment with pursed lips, frowning at the Bench; then, throwing out one hand, he resumed in a softer key—

“Sir, it will not do. We were not tired of life. We were anxious to reach home—the land of our loved ones—and we adopted every precaution known to sailors to reach it in safety. It is not contended by my friend that our lights were not burning. They saw them. They merely argue that they were inadequate. Well, sir, if you take that view, there is but one hypothesis left to us. If you consider we are in the smallest degree responsible for the terrible loss of life and all the suffering entailed by it, then, I say, it is time we overhauled our Act. I go further. I say that if we do not overhaul our Act, if we do not replace regulations which are time-worn, and order appliances in accordance with the new conditions, then are we guilty of criminal negligence and are accessory to every disaster that occurs at sea.”

As Harrod resumed his seat a distinct round of applause broke from the back of the court. He had spoken strongly and with deep feeling. He had spoken with the acumen of one trained in Admiralty law, who knew every trick and turn of seamanship, and the bystanders hummed their content. It was sublime. Harrod as a cross-examiner had not shone; but Harrod as an advocate touched the hearts of more than these two fair women who sat with drawn veils watching the closing scene in this tragedy—

touched them and brought forth that note of applause condemned of old time as it was condemned now by the chairman in words not his—"Silence in court. This is not a theatre. If I hear any further ebullition of feeling I shall order the court to be cleared."

Purple-visaged, fat, the man loomed in Helen's imagination as the embodiment of Content holding the scales to a blindfold people. Then, as the last note of that dire threat died away, gazing through the mists, she saw Bannerman on his feet, his keen nose scenting game, his lithe body full of energy, waiting till the leash was slipped.

He began to speak, twisting his pince-nez by the cord as though it were a metronome marking the swing of his sentences. Clear-cut, precise, relying absolutely on the evidence, he assumed at once the prosecuting attitude. He indulged in no flights, drew no pictures, but contented himself with hammering in the facts, and sat down after speaking less than ten minutes—sat down and leaned negligently in his chair, arms outspread. It was as though the case was decided and he had won. The two girls read it so, shivering.

But the Court was not prepared to give judgment off-hand. A court consisting of men unaccustomed to deal with Admiralty law must, of necessity, take counsel with its advisors; therefore the chairman, after some whispering and handling of watches, presently leaned forward to announce that the parties to the suit might come up for judgment on the morrow, and with that the tension died.

To-morrow. Well, here, at all events, was further respite for Arthur Norris—an opportunity to seek his wife, Helen, Marchmont, or Callaghan; but he avoided them. He got himself out of court in Harrod's company, and melted into the mist cloaking so jealously the footpaths and roadways of the great grey city. Got himself away from all his friends, and down to the landing-stage—that magic promenade for human seeking oblivion.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE INTERREGNUM.

Nature, the great scenic artist, was busy with its brushes, scumbling in the high lights, sketching kaleidoscopic views on the windows, picking out the little twigs and branches of the oaks and elms, and washing the roofs with white, when, towards one o'clock, Arthur Norris came up the village road.

The trees stood out gnarled and skeleton-like against the blackness; white messengers of the wintry night filtered through the branches, lighting the road with small, crisp specks, lighting the path between him and that giant town asleep in the greyness. Small, tinselled spangles, indefinably fragile, subtle, and alluring, calling to mind the dreams of childhood, brightening the way from earth to heaven. They fell there in his path, to be crunched presently and blackened under foot. A myriad gems scintillated in the hedgerows on either hand. It was cold. The night held out a finger beckoning this man to rest, advising him ponderously of the burden he carried—all nature slept, but he passed on unseeing, eyes searching the road, brain alert.

Somewhere in the shadows of the great city he had left, the big Ben of the Cheshire shores sent a note shivering through the stillness, challenging the fog to stifle it. And on every hand was darkness. The darkness of a land sunk in mist, shrouded, impenetrable. Scarcely a window of all the thousands showed light. Not one soul in every thousand appeared afoot—cabbies gone home, tram-men, train-men, porters, and all the world of workers at home and asleep. Asleep and dreaming. Asleep and at rest. Yet here, far down the Bidston road, came Arthur Norris, walking with that strangely virile gait of his, unmindful of sleep, not tired but wide-eyed, brain at work, battling with problems.

The knowledge that he was beaten, that he had scarcely

attempted resolute defence, did not harass him. It seemed necessary, on consideration, that the fitter of the two should win—and of them Callaghan was able, strenuous, full of life; while he, it appeared, was tired, worn out, on the edge of oblivion. Still, this did not appeal to him. It was an adjunct simply. It belonged to the history of that day he had endured. And amidst the thoughts came, ever surging deeper and more imperative, the recollection of Ethel's presence in court. Ethel with Marchmont beside her. Ethel, bright of face, vivacious, a violet-haunting presence, sitting to watch while he writhed on the spit. That was terrible. The fact that she had chosen to witness his degradation, unforgivable: an offence against delicacy redolent of the age. He put out his hands, pushing back the knowledge. "It was monstrous," he decided, "monstrous," and the phrase rang with his footsteps on the hard, white road. Head bent, eyes alive, brain registering trifles, storing them, multiplying them, and garnering from dust the veriest mountains of annoyance, he walked there, staring at the road.

He arrived at the Cottage gates and paused. He had come thus far to enter, yet he paused. A moment he faced the gates, then hurried on, halted, turned, moved back.

At the end of the long avenue a dim light showed in the hall, otherwise the house was dark. For a week he had not slept within those walls. For two months the place could not truthfully have been called his home. But now he had decided to enter. Ethel, Helen, the servants—every one was, of course, in bed. It mattered nothing. He hoped they also slept.

He came down the drive, unlocked the door, and stepped in. Gas still burned in the hall, a fire shimmered in a grate at the far end. A warm, red hall, lighted by glowing coal and twin ruby globes. He noticed that some one had placed glasses, water, and a few sandwiches on the black oak table. The oak reflected these things faithfully.

He crossed over, found whisky, and mixing a glass, sat down to examine the fire. A great silence lay over all

the house. Only the clock was alive—ticking, solemn as an old man's thoughts. Above the high mantel-shelf were swords, trophies, curiosities from the sea—the magic sea which had called him long ago, and left him stranded. Behind and on either hand were engravings, etchings, crossed swords and guns, Indian bows, a Chinese stink-pot, a Malay kris or two—a veritable armoury of ancient weapons: his father's and grandfather's tools, which had come down to him to guard—and pass on.

And now they must go. Every one of these things must go. Jacky would never own them. It mattered nothing, for with their exit would vanish also the accursed call of the sea—the beckoning finger, the incentive which had taken him out and brought him to this stage. "This paltry stage," he emphasised, staring again into the fire, "this paltry stage. This damnable stage of lack-lustre life, when all interests shrivel, and we live as the old live, on the dead ashes of our past."

He rose from his chair and moved round the hall. It was his. In the natural course it had come to him, and in the natural course he would have been prepared to relinquish it and pass it on to others—to Jacky and Claire. But here something had intervened, stepped across the threshold and ordered him to stand. Something far-reaching, and against which he was unable to fight—a thing garnered from the sea that had wooed him; a disorder, a disease, a melting away of the tissues of control; a process which left him flabby, weak, inert—full of palpitations, misery. This process he endured, standing up to watch its advance. This hideous ravager was part of his being, part of the essence of his life. It was unnatural. It was accursed, monstrous, unstaying—a thing always advancing to obtain new grips, tearing down the stronghold bit by bit, piece by piece, atom by atom—until he ended. . . . Where?

The question amazed him by the suddenness of its approach. Nothing had happened to suggest the sequence of thought which had led to it. He was standing before an old, carved-ivory chair—a chair shorn from a Buddhist temple, and given to an ancestor sojourning awhile at

Bangkok. A praying chair. A grotesque and demoniacal engine for enticing the spirit of worship. A chair he had often rested in—seeing visions, hearing voices, dreaming of that world he had gone out to examine in childlike innocence from the deck of a merchant-man. It was said to be a chair of miraculous power; one in which, if a man sat and closed his eyes for certain minutes, he would see his future, learn the secrets of earth and heaven. Hitherto he had always kept noisily awake when sitting there—but that was long ago, in the days of glamour and belief and fascination.

Now these things were dead, and he sat with closed eyes calmly awaiting miracles. But he saw only the countless comet-like spirals that burst flaming across his vision, and caught the hint of a footstep on the stairs. Nothing else. All dead black. No fancies. No illusions. No gimcrack idiocies. All black—dead black, with a sprinkling of fireworks, rockets, squibs.

He could sit there an hour, he decided, and see nothing. Therefore he opened his eyes and rose, petulant, amazed with his fancies. Helen, wrapped warmly in a soft and fluffy pink gown, stood before him, her eyes round and pleading, her lips framed for speech.

He moved across as though he had expected her, and laid one hand on her shoulder lightly.

"I didn't summon you, little cousin," he said with a pathetic upward twist; "it was the end I wanted to see—the end, savvy?"

"Arthur," she wailed, holding her voice to a whisper, "you are killing yourself. For all our sakes you must take more care. You must—you must!"

"Care," he hazarded, "what for?"

"Have you no love left, . . . no thought for any of us?"

"For you, Helen, . . . for Jacky and Claire even—but for . . ."

"Don't! I won't hear it. She is your wife."

"I am mated with a refrigerator," he scoffed, bowing. "In summer sometimes it is pleasant to be near ice, but in winter—b-r-r-r-r!" he shuddered, "it is death."

"Arthur!"

"Go to bed, little coz," he advised gravely. "Don't bother about me. I am all serene—distinctly serene. Never better in my life."

"Arthur!" she cried again. Then drawing nearer, "I have never interfered between you two—never, never; and I wouldn't do so now, but that I can see that Ethel is eating her heart out, and I believe it is time to speak."

"Yes?" he questioned, vaguely mindful of the necessity to humour her, "Yes?"

"Ethel cried to-night, Arthur. It is awful—awful."

"Ethel cried, did she—hum, I wonder why?"

"She cried because you did not come; because you have not been near us for . . . oh! how long is it?"

"A week," he promptly decided. "I have been busy. Hum-m-m! and so Ethel cried, did she?"

"Will you go up to her?" she begged,—“go up to her room and have a talk, and get friends again, . . . and . . . let us be happy . . .”

"Happy?" he broke in cynically. "Yes, that would be delightful. The sort of thing your B. P. asks for as a climax. Wedding bells, the return of the prodigal, and a general hash-up of stage favourites—yes, that would be very nice."

"I won't speak to you," she flashed, "if you continue in that strain."

"The strain is a result, not a cause, Helena," he gently informed her. "Some women under their soft left breast carry a heart; other women carry a Brazil nut—a hard, wizened, inflammable thing that throws off coruscations demanding friendships illimitable. But you are one of those blessed with a heart that knows its desire—you are steadfast, . . . you . . . Oh, very well . . . Yes, I promise. I will go up and see her. I intended to before you came—there, will that do?"

She nodded her delight, eyes flashing, hands gripping the pretty finery at her breast—"I am so glad. Do go—there's a dear old boy—and, Arthur, don't say anything about—about your case. It is awful, but never mind it."

We have lots of money between us, and our books and pictures are bound to come off presently, and then it will be all right—won't it?"

"Right?" he questioned gravely, "rather." Then with a sudden flicker in his voice he crossed to the foot of the stairs and held out his hand—"Wish me luck, Helena," he begged, "just one bit of luck, . . . for a change, eh?"

She paused, came near, and taking his face in hand leaned forward and kissed him. "The greatest, the best," she returned steadily. "Go to her, and God bless you."

She turned at once and passed to her room, and ten minutes later Arthur stood at his wife's bedside.

Like the world of men dwelling in the grim city streets, and as though worn with their buffeting, Ethel Norris slept. Peacefully, like a child, with a smile on her beautiful mouth; her glorious hair thrown out across the pillow, her lips red and moist, her form outlined by the silken coverlet—she lay at rest, dreaming, happy; at peace with all the world.

Arthur Norris stood watching, and for a moment resentment flamed. It seemed monstrous that she could rest thus, impossible that she could have wept at his absence, —absurd, ridiculous, all the gamut of idiocy. He drew back. She was beautiful. A woman easily tired, young, sweet to look upon. He owed her some apology for his conduct, his action which he told himself had been the result of her harebrained madness, her desire for admiration, adulation, and all the sick fancies of the full-blooded flirt. No, he would put it to the touch, he who had left her on that night at the imperious summoning of danger. If she loved him she would . . . No, it was impossible. Suddenly there had leaped into his mind the fact that it was Helen who had waited for him, Helen who had seen to the fire, placed the glasses for his comfort, and who had now given him this view. He put out a hand and almost roughly pressed Ethel's shoulder.

She opened her eyes with a little cry of terror, but on seeing her husband standing there, the gaze fell, the glance drew back, as it were, became coldly astonished, plainly

annoyed. Then at length came the words, chilling him, pushing him back. "Obviously," he decided, watching her, "if she has wept it was not at my absence."

"What is it?" she questioned. Then as he made no answer, "I do wish you would be less erratic."

"Erratic?" he remarked, shrinking farther into that dim shell we call self, at the reading he had made. "I don't follow you quite. But that does not matter. I want to talk to you—you had better get up for an hour. The night is young, and I don't seem to have any other opportunity, except in court. And I am not sure you would care to hear what I have to say while Colonel Marchmont is in attendance." He turned round at the words and moved irascibly to the fire, where he stood elbowing the mantel. "Marchmont," he resumed, without raising his voice, but speaking distinctly, bitingly,—“once it was Jackson, then it was Calston, now it is Marchmont. Very well. I objected to Jackson, and Jackson resigned. I objected to honest John, and poor Calston was drowned of your whims. Now I object to the colonel. I am putting this quietly, but I am putting it straight. There is no occasion for words or any sort of . . . er. . . . scene. Only just let us understand where we stand, eh?"

Ethel had risen, gathered a dressing-gown, and now came across the carpet, her little pink feet bare, her face flushed with sleep, her eyes steady. She stood by the fire. "Yes," she decided, "I think it is best, too."

He caught a glimpse of her shoeless condition and found slippers and a chair.

"Put these on and sit down," he requested. Then as she complied, "I am glad you look on the thing reasonably; now about this friend of yours."

"Colonel Marchmont wishes to meet you and consult as to the course I am to take . . ."

"I do not choose to meet him."

"Very well; then we must decide without you."

"Decide what?"

She made a small motion of impatience, lifting her brows. "Oh, well, it seems necessary that I sh

do something to earn my living, and as I can sing, Colonel . . .”

“Leave his name out of the discussion.”

“I can’t. You don’t understand these things. I must have introductions, . . . he is a musician and knows all the big-wigs. In fact, I don’t see how it is to be done without him.”

“Nevertheless, you must pass him by,” he decided.

Ethel glanced up at the tone. She regarded it as an affront, considering their relations of late, and answered swiftly, “Must! That is absurd.”

“I desire it,” he said more sternly.

“Very well, then I must refuse,” she announced, drawing her gown more closely about her. “Colonel Marchmont has been very kind. He desires to help me and to help you. I don’t choose to insult him.”

Arthur Norris looked up quickly at this. To him the whole subject was redolent of the pit. To him there could be but one end to this philandering on a glass-tipped wall; an end of cuts and pain and bruises; of shouting abhorrent matter before judges, juries, and the whole paraphernalia of modern *duella*. Yet he was unable to make any suggestion that should alter the trend of their lives; unable to persuade or coerce this beautiful woman who sat before him so calmly discussing her future. A strange mist oppressed him. For a moment it appeared that he could no longer think, then with a rapid clutch at the idea with which he had begun this interview, but floating now only hazily before him, he said—

“I see, but you don’t mind insulting me? Well, well, let it pass. . . .” Suddenly he leaned forward with twitching nostrils. “Pity I didn’t go with the poor old *Coorong*, eh? With Calston and the others instead of forgetting my babies and saving my skin. Cha! You don’t understand it. Can’t see with my eyes. Can’t hear the voices pestering me. You have no thought for me, no word of palliation for my offence; no word of encouragement for my writing, . . . writing! Good God! I never write now. That is dead . . . dead . . . But I



forgot, there was to be no scene, no theatricals, only plain speaking . . ."

He turned away and marched the room swiftly for some minutes, while Ethel, leaning forward in her chair, covered her face with her hands.

"Is it too late?" he questioned at this. "Can't we two stand together?"

"You insult me at every turn," she announced unmoved. "I am tired of playing the peacemaker. I can make no promises."

"You can't forget that I deserted you—is that it?"

She made no answer.

"Or that I left you to take care of the children, . . . forgot everything but my own skin. Is that it?"

"I would forget it if I could," she threw out suddenly, "but I can't—I can't."

"Very well."

The definition of her position seemed to give him strength. He came back, and standing beside her, resumed in even tones—

"Well, and when we consider it, I don't know but that you are right—not in sticking to Marchmont, mind, but in not attempting to play the peacemaker, as you term it, to me. I have not been quite a success—so far—and from what I can see, the trial is going to clinch matters. A derelict isn't much use as a husband, . . . er . . . but there are side issues. It didn't occur to you, perhaps, that I stand to be run over in this business, or that your friend's brother-in-law runs the car that will do the crunching?"

"My friend's brother-in-law—who?" she demanded, looking up, white and angry at the tone. °

"M'Gee."

"I don't believe it."

"'Though one rose from the dead,'" he quoted, and stopped.

"Mr M'Gee is most kind." °

"Out of business hours," he returned, sneering.

"I decline to argue."

"I agree. There is no necessity. We shall soon know, and then, if it comes, as I expect it will, you will find I

shall do the fair thing by you and the . . . kinders. What I can, at all events. And as far as I am concerned, . . . well, perhaps that need not enter into the . . . the question. That is not the word I meant to use—but it will suffice." He broke off, then went on abruptly, "Now you are dead tired, and I have been keeping you up. You'll go to bed, eh?"

"What are you going to do?"

He watched her face, reading it with swift intuition. "What do you wish me to do?"

"You must please yourself," she decided, without a thrill. "I should be sorry to interfere with your arrangements."

"Thanks. Yes—well, perhaps you are right. I shall get down to my hotel—ready for the boat in the morning."

He moved across the room, glanced over his shoulder, and seeing Ethel still leaning forward in her chair, opened the door and went out.

In the hall the fire still burned cosily. The clock still ticked. The reflections still dyed the oak. Norris sat down in the old chair, resting his feet on the fender, face in hands. For perhaps an hour he remained thus, then rose, ascended the stairs, and entered the night nursery. The children slept smiling. He stooped over Claire, put back the hair from her eyes, and kissed her. Claire turned on her side, and catching sight of him, said in the hurried tones of one only half-awake, "Oh, please, dad, dearmiss wants you in the dromer-room," and immediately fell asleep.

Norris crossed softly to Jacky and kissed him too. Jacky slept on unmindful. Then glancing at his watch, Norris passed again into the hall, and fortified with whisky, got himself out into the roadway.

"Br-r-r-r!" he said, as he turned towards town, "if dearest wants me, she has a remarkable method of showing her desire."

From far down amidst the maze of houses came again the stroke of time, solemn, muffled by the fog—"Boo-oom! boo-oom! boo-oom!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

*LEX TALIONIS.*

A dim morning followed a dim night. The fog still held. Smoke-sodden it rolled down the river, staring at the havoc wrought since the sun was vanquished. Briskly it swept about the plates of that worn tramp lying askew off Formby; jauntily it smirked round the bends of that coaster beached at New Brighton; curiously it danced over the mastheads visible down there off the Fort; humming it strayed into the gaunt hole in that collier footing the ooze—then out and about to twist and search a body floating there like a sack amidst the channels.

For it is fog that is king of our ocean highways, fog that chokes our rivers and estuaries, fog that steps down and slows the liners, fog that makes the underwriters thin. And it is fog that aids us to shed our rattle-traps, fog that finds salvage for the red-wheeled tugs, and fog that fattens the man who owns docks for repairs.

Nothing else is king, only fog.

And here, in the steam and roar of the great city, bells clanging, carts rumbling, river signals echoing, Norris came fluttering to hear his sentence. He was alone still. He had not slept, but he was shaved and tubbed, and felt curiously desirous of song.

Words jumbled in his brain. He could find meaning in most, but not readily in that remark of Harrod's heard on the steps of the Grecian Temple last night. "What in the world made you change your tack half-way through?" "Tack. What tack?" Norris decided that the voice piping the question was grossly irrelevant, and as he crossed the Goree and James Street junction, found himself amazed at the vision he beheld of a woman, tall, copper-haired, dressed in a bronze wrap and wearing no slippers, who leaned forward with her chin sunk in her hands to search the fire.

He decided she was the same woman who had come into his dreams yesterday, before Harrod made that

puzzling speech, only then she was dressed in a long green coat and furs and had boots on her feet. He remembered that he had caught sight of her eyes, a cold look resting there, recollected the shiver that had run down his spine, and how Helen of the dark eyes and pleading glance had begged him to go up and see her again. These things had to do with the change of tack, that was certain.

Far away in the back of his head a voice piped acquiescence. "Certain," then again, "what has happened has happened. It is Fate—kismet," a thing Harrod knew only by hearsay, and outwardly poohed, . . . "Hi, you there!" came the voice of a driver of horses churning through the fog, "out o' t' bloomin' roaad, 'nless y' wants . . ." the words rolled into profanity as Norris skipped to the curb and continued his journey unabashed.

He moved slowly up street. Like an automaton, a stage doll jerkily perambulating on wires, he came up the footway. To-morrow was upon him, walking with him, riding him bravely with spurs pressed home. He recognised nothing of this, but only the burden he carried. That he understood, stretching out his hands at intervals like a blind man searching the path for the sign-posts he knows.

A crowd of people debouched upon the pavement at the exit from the Mersey tube and went swinging through the fog towards the city. The cries of newspaper and match boys redoubled. Their strident voices pierced the air, and it vibrated with sharp, discordant notes. Out there in the roadway trams buzzed clanging their gongs. Deep in the bowels of the earth a train rumbled. People darted from the murk of the pavement and were lost in the murk of the road. Still Norris moved on buoyantly, dreaming his dreams, seeing his visions, listening to the voices so jumbled and extraordinary at this distance, and came to Lord Street. Here a tram took possession of him and whirled him through the sulphurous labyrinth where Hedonists still craned necks searching the shop fronts, like bees hovering before a hive in gloomy weather. He came to Lime Street and alighted.

In the square the fog was thinner. The wide open space revealed traces of ghostly houses, ghostly statues, and the imposing solemnity of that Grecian Temple where by some strange chance Solomon sat to deliver judgements.

Harrod came up: Bannerman, Callaghan,—and again, as they were about to enter, a cab rolled to the steps, and Ethel, Helen, and Marchmont ascended waving hands. But Norris baffled them by one swift turn, and passed the great carved doors. Within that room was silence—no one could approach. He took his place there. He realised a certain measure of safety within that railed-off space, where magistrates presided to rule the disorderly. There was no need for speech, and he could think, perhaps coherently, if he did not speak. That phase oppressed him. He had become puzzled, mazed, and could not disentangle his thoughts. They carried him nowhither, rambling musingly of yesterday, last night, and to-morrow—yet nothing evolved.

He became engrossed presently in talk—a huge chatter about something wrapped in legal cotton-wool, something in which it was desired that he should take a certain line, and in which Callaghan presently joined issue. It troubled him to be compelled to speak at all. There was so much that ought to be thought out, so much that inevitably was his to arrange, . . . and yet—was it necessary: and if it were, need he bother now?

He moved across to a place which seemed to have been assigned to him for centuries—since that day, in point of fact, when in Backstairs Passage the *Coorong* had missed stays, and the rocks had nearly received her. He felt the tingling spray, heard the roar of the sails, and caught a note of the crew's voice, hallooing hoarsely in the murk, and came into his place with a set face, immobile. His muscles no longer gave him away. In some mysterious fashion he had regained control, and was able to face his enemies without whimpering.

So he put it, and at the same instant became aware of the rustling of silken skirts, and knew by the subtle scent of violets that his wife was behind him. He turned to see. Unmoved, sombre, cold, he met Ethel's eyes, decided

she had been laughing, caught a gleam of Helen's appeal, and faced about like a man on a pedestal. Faced about and became the receiver of certain information pouring from the pursed lips of the Controller of Stores. Like the wax cylinders of a phonograph his brain took down the record.

"The Court finds," said the voice of Solomon, "that the *Coorong* foundered on being struck by the *Sentinel*. . . ."

"As though she could have foundered without being struck!" the little voice quavered musingly in Norris's ear; "eh, what?"

". . . That a lamentable loss of life ensued, part, if not all, of which might, in the opinion of the Court, have been avoided if the master of the *Coorong* had given instructions to lower the boats at once. . . ."

"Damned bad sentence, Mr Solomon, and not true," piped the small treble. "Boats on skids, . . . take half an hour . . . B-r-r-r-r-r!"

". . . They are of opinion that the disaster was due solely to the action of the master of the *Coorong*, who, by porting his helm, disobeyed articles 20 and 21 of the Regulations for preventing collisions at sea. . . ."

"Quite so," commented the voice; "very wrong of him. Silly, too, now you come to think of it—eh, what?"

". . . Further, they are of opinion that the *Coorong* was carrying too much sail, and was not, therefore, navigated in a careful and seamanlike manner. And"—here Solomon became impressive, and the cylinder took down the sounds in heavy lines, blobbed and criss-crossed like the track of a spider with inky legs—"and in view of the fact that the safety of our shipping depends not only on the action of one or two individuals, but on the action of all, the Court is of opinion that it is necessary to remind masters that the Regulations are instructions which must be obeyed. . . ."

"Course . . . course . . . course . . .," the voice drivelled, laughing shrilly.

". . . In our experience . . . so gross a case . . . has scarcely ever been heard, . . . we consider . . . that . . . meet it—the certificate of the . . . master

of the *Coorong* shall be suspended for a period of twelve months. . . .”

So far Solomon’s pursed lips, then silence.

It appeared that all men searched Norris<sup>o</sup>, and he, glancing up, dallied with the face of Solomon, saw the double-chin creased over the tips of a little sharp collar, and became interested in the rolls of fat wrinkling up there behind the ears. He counted them.

Then again the cylinder awoke to take down hieroglyphics. Harrod was speaking—urging something on behalf of a client who apparently had lost; gathered that Harrod desired the Court to grant the use of a mate’s certificate during the period of suspension, and smiled when, after some consultation, Solomon seriously shook off the suggestion with—

“No—no; sorry to be compelled. Case without precedent. In the opinion of the Court Captain Norris would do well to take a holiday.”

“Holiday!” piped the voice behind the white, strained face; “hooray! holiday!”

So it ended.

The work begun on the gallant old *Worcester*, asleep off Greenhithe, at the edge of the Thames, where, with Callaghan, Norris had gone arms-linked, fought the yokels and grubbed at the tuck shop; where he had worn smart uniforms, and won the medal for seamanship—a medal which, perhaps, some day Jacky might care to examine—all over, . . . all done with. Complete. Finished precisely as though he were dead. Finished, and he was not dead. That was the amazing part of it. Finished, and he still breathed. Finished, and the fact did not bother him. He examined the pattern in the great chair wherein Solomon sat, and remarked that Callaghan had gone round to the back of the court, where Ethel and Helen and Marchmont apparently intended to live.

It troubled Norris that at this moment Callaghan should have thought first of those people, and before he had decided what to do—whether to wait for him or join Harrod—he found himself moving with the lawyer to the door.

Apparently Solomon had further business to transact; more cases to frown on; more babies to cut in two. . . . "Eh, I beg your pardon?" He leaned forward to catch Harrod's words. "Sorry? oh, it doesn't matter. I am not sorry. I seem to have lost a load—a devil of a load, . . . and, er . . . Gad!" he stretched his arms, yawning, "I had nearly forgotten to thank you, nearly. . . . I don't kn . . ."

"Never mind thanks," Harrod rejoined. "I wish it had gone otherwise. Confounded ridiculous of you to change your tack. . . . Gave the whole case away."

"Oh, as far as that goes," Norris flashed. "Well—and if I had won poor old Dick would have lost, eh?"

"Dick?"

"Callaghan is Dick," he explained.

"Then Dick be damned!" Harrod announced wrathfully. "Dick is very well able to take care of himself. Dick has no wife to think about."

Norris assimilated this news as they reached the steps, and for a moment the lawyer stood watching him narrowly through half-closed eyes; searching the face which had been so mobile, and wondering at the tense, expressionless gaze—at the eyes which met his, stared into his, irresponsive, dark as the grave. He decided that Norris looked queer, and taking him by the arm hurried him across to the North-Western. There, in the smoke-room, hedged by magnates, they solemnly pledged each other in whisky and seltzer, bowing like a pair of pigeons over the rims of their tumblers, and emerged, linked, upon the platform.

Harrod hailed a cab and entered. "Well," he said, leaning over the doors, "give me a look up in a few days; and don't pine."

"Pine—what for?"

"Precisely. One minute, cabby! And if you want advice, you know, about this mortgage business, . . . or anything, look me up. It will come on in a day or so, . . . oh, yes, . . . and while I am about it, let it be a friendly affair. Costly business this—for you. Understand?"

Harrod clattered out of the yard red and puffing. Norris watched his departure, blinking, solemn as an owl; then



he too hailed a cab and drove. The landing-stage received him.

It was grey down there by the river, grey under the bridgeways, grey amidst the giant moorings rising and falling in the mud; grey over there where the Irish boat was fussily clattering with winches and preparing to face the more distant greyness.

The morning passed, afternoon waned, and evening came—yet Norris still walked the stage. Crowds passed and repassed him. It was nothing—the man prowled unseeing. The water swirled muddily close at hand. He stared into the depths—they were grey, grey as the mists which cloaked them; grey as the temple from whence he had come. The planks were sodden, oozing greyness. The ferries for the most part lay at rest, the seats under the covered spaces reeked moisture. Norris moved onward wrapped in the greyness.

A little street Arab, one of Liverpool's satyrs, emerged from the mist, sloppily paddling in slime to offer his wares—"Evenin' paper, sir, . . . spechul edichun. . . . Football spechul, sir. . . ."

Norris looked at him, saw the dirt and mire of the great city clinging to him; marked the blue vistas of flesh open to the cold, saw the festoons in which he stood, and fumbled for a coin—

"Spechul, sir?"

Norris found a shilling and presented it. He took no paper. The boy stared. He spat upon the coin and tucked it amidst his rags. He scuttled off jubilant in the murk.

A shilling had worked this miracle—a shilling! So great are the differences made by environment. The notion took root in a brain tired of sorrow, tired of strenuousness, tired of fighting!

The child was white with cold, his eyes were red, his face wizened, old—the face of one already half-dead. It seemed a pity on consideration to have given that shilling. A shilling meant resuscitation, and, for a day, new life. And after? Pish! He was one of the millions who clamour for bread; one of those whom all cities with any

pretensions to greatness hold at the extreme end of a stick—a specimen of Liverpool's submerged twentieth. He were better at rest. All derelicts are better at rest. As all great cities forget their derelicts, so had Liverpool forgotten him. On this point Norris had no illusions.

The evening waned. Lights peeped out, burning shamedly in blobs of mist. Night fell. And with it came the renewed clamour of the river and her children, calling out, blowing trumpets—cheeks puffed with effort.

The ships moved sleepily up stream.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE CITY'S VORTEX.

Night on the landing-stage. The wind persistently evasive. The fog thick. Here and away a steamer prowled, ghost-like and signal-blurred, waking the sluggish air with the outcries of her sirene. The thud of her propeller ascended to the stage like the tapping of a war-drum heard deep in an African forest. Her lamps burned in splotches like the moon peeping on an angry night—dim, with a halo of yellow. The Woodside boats still ran. Carefully shouting their advent they passed across and across the chasm, carrying stray passengers hardy enough to dare delay, or exuberant enough to desire a fresh sensation. But Norris was not of these. A warm home far up the hillside appealed to him not at all. At this moment it seemed a place to be avoided. The people who lived there critics with hazy notions of justice. He had halted, enthralled by the jar and rumble of the carts and horses, midway up the stage, as they crept from the long steep bridge to the ferry which was to carry them to Woodside. •

A luminous splotch of blurred light hung lambent over the great beamed craft sitting there open-mouthed to receive them. She looked red and Gorgon-like, and with

horrid maw snapped them up as they passed creaking into place. Fog shrouded her farther side.

And from the city streamed carts bearing the spoils of the shops—carts carrying tea and sugar, better, and dainties for the table; carts carrying wire and rope and kegs of paint for the docks. Carts with dazzling advertisements proclaiming the heyday of success, carts with blurred and dingy sides acknowledging their travail. And before them all, harnessed and jingling in shining steel, marched the patient horses. Out of the fog on the snake-like bridge, into the fog of the churning Gorgon—placid, unafraid, interpreting the gross violence of their drivers with brute-like fidelity and a tossing of heads. They backed into place, straining sinews to obey; slipping, plunging, sweating, until the wide, lined decks were stacked, then stood without a quiver while the horn began its music up there in the murk by the funnel. Horses with shining coats waited there, sleek under their cloths, gratefully acknowledging the dividends of beer; horses worn and crippled in the service of parcels—dejected, drooping of head, with nostrils distended and panting sides; horses lean and sorry, horses stout and robust; the horses of a magnate champing for the spin to Deeside, the horses of rag-and-bone men shivering and halt—they stood there, placid, intelligent, listening to the foghorn, listening to the grumble of machinery, noting the quivering decks, and passed with a clang of raised platforms into the silence of the fog.

Norris moved on. The sounds appealed to him. He knew the method by which that loaded Gorgon would reach the farther shore, and heard again the war of whips and threatenings as cart and trolley emerged upon the long pontoon at Woodside. The oaths. The blows. The quivering sides, tossing heads, strained girths, the snapped chains, the slippery incline, iron upon iron, sparks flying, and ever the patient beasts, obeying the hand of their lords, working out their destiny.

The knowledge oppressed Norris. He turned sorrowfully from staring at the Gorgon and moved toward the quieter region far up beyond the Riverside station. And

here quite suddenly another figure emerged upon the scene—Flynn, the Irish-American, who had followed his commander from the Courts, tracked him down, waited and now approached with two shadowing him. He came up without fear, openly, in the full knowledge of his impeccable position, and touched the captain's shoulder.

Norris turned round with a swift movement and raised his hand.

"Pish!" he said. "You . . ." and after a momentary hesitation, "Well, what d'you want?"

Flynn looked him in the face, pulling the goatee beard he wore. •

"Whhat do I want? I loike that, begorra, I do. Whhat do I want?" Sorr, I want whhat you're goin' to give me, right here annyways. Shtand back an' spake civil. I'm yer equal now, an' ut's not the plough I'm takin' to at all, at all."

Norris glanced up the stage and caught sight of the shadowy pair now lurking at Flynn's elbow—men of the bruiser type, caps viciously tilted over scoundrelly faces—yet their presence scarcely appealed to him. He knew in his heart that there was danger of rowdyism. He recognised that this man whom he had promoted was drunk, or on the verge of it, and that he owed him a grudge for some reason not quite comprehensible. He knew too that if sufficient noise were made help might be obtained in certain long-drawn minutes, but he had no instinct warning him to summon it; he was entirely immersed in the necessity of keeping himself and his slipshod past from further acquaintance with the courts. He desired to go his way in peace and looked up, saying—

"I don't quite see what you mean, . . . but I have nothing to give. I am broken by this day's issue, and you, as far as I understand it, are untouched. Let me pass." •

Flynn advanced and the pair moved in slouchingly, the bully lurch self-advertised.

"Let ye pass? We will, sorr, whin we've had our little talk. Close in, mates," said the Irishman.

The pair closed in, and Flynn resumed with the air of one who desires to put himself right with the world.

"I followed yez out of the court-house because I found me mouth shut in ut. I followed yez down here an' waited fer dhark because I thought it possible ye'd wish for dhark, an' now ut is dhark, an' there's no wan within a half-mile of yez, bar the tuggies out yonder an' they're nursin' toes on the stoke-hole plates av I know annythin' av steamboatin'. So we're alone, sorr, you and me an' my mates, an' we can talk."

"Talk, yes. . . . Well, and what do you want now the thing is possible?" Norris ventured, noting the silence, the steaming fog, the far-away lamps. "What do you want? Out with it."

"Good," said the left-hand ruffian; "spit it out, mate."

"Stright," said he on the right, "wiv no bloomin' side talk."

"Right," Flynn acquiesced, his voice taking a whining and persuasive intonation with the words. "Ain't I comin' to ut, ain't I? Yew leave ut to me. Cap'n Norris," he drew himself up, a very melodramatic villain for all to see, "yew've ruined me, savvy? an' I want compensation."

Norris glanced him over. For a moment he seemed inclined to laugh. The intonation was so absurd, the swagger so obviously forced, but without giving voice to it he half turned on his heel, saying contemptuously, "Compensation, eh? Well, I trust you may get it. Let me pass."

"Not me," said the Irishman grimly.

"Pish! man—stand aside!" Norris cried out. "You are drunk."

"Dhrunk? Maybe—but not too dhrunk to hold you up."

He took off his coat and flung it on the planks, squaring up, and making a great show with his fists.

"That's the bloomin' hammer!" said the left-hand ruffian with decision. "Knock spots off of 'im. I'll 'old yer cap."

"The hull caboodle comes t' this," the right-hand supporter announced, moving in, "fork over the spondulic!

or take a bastin', and get pitched into the river—see?" He bared his arm menacingly.

"But I have no money," Norris expostulated, his eye rapidly calculating the odds. "Gad! I'm ruined myself—can't you see I'm ruined? Doesn't it appeal to you?"

He might with equal relevancy have argued with the Mersey, and on the whole Nature would have found the softer answer. Flynn drew close, shaking his fist, a malevolent apparition with a tobacco-stained beard and massive jaw.

"Appeal be damned!" he half-shouted. "There's no brass in appeal—hand over. Ruined! Well, I'll be eternally gol-dolled—an' I've seen yer house. Seen it, mister! A high-toned crib, with trees an' gardens an' c'nservatories. Ruined! an' yeu with yer moters and bicycles, an' yer maids floppin' round the 'all with their white caps an' fall-lalls. Garn! who 're ye gettin' at?"

Norris stared. He was confused and bewildered, his brain weary from the ordeal he had lately survived, and scarcely capable of any battle either of wits or force. On the whole he was inclined to laugh. The position seemed so incongruous—he, the ruined skipper, held up for compensation!

Flynn noticed the effect of his words, observed that his opponent did not dream of fight, and went on biting—  
"Tell me yeu air ruined, an' I've seen yer wife skippin' around in her furs an' diamonds? Garn! what air yeu givin' us? Juellry, sorr," he announced, "sticks in yer oyes at Heath Cottage. Money looks you in the face at every thurn—an' I want some av ut. An' I'm goin' to have some av ut—to recompense me for the disgraceful action ye forced upon me with your gol-dolled ordhers—savvy. Your ordhers," he emphasised, "that made me jump an' lave all those . . ."

"Sh-h-h-h! Silence, man!" Norris cried out. "I won't be talked to like . . ."

"Ye won't—eh?"

The Irishman loomed hugely in the fog with his twin supporters. "Ye won't—eh? Thin we must take yez where ye'll learn reason—hitch in, mates . . ."

"Stand back!" Norris cried out. "Hallo there! Hallo!"

"Shoutin'—eh?" said the Irishman. "S-s-s-t! Take that—an' that . . ."

Two heavy blows followed, and Norris collapsed, bleeding and stunned, on the wet planks.

The Irishman pocketed a hand which a moment before had been bare, but now was clad across the knuckles with heavy iron rings. When he withdrew it the knuckles were again bare. He stooped with the others over Norris, grumblingly acknowledging he had been over swift to strike, and that the blow had fallen too heavily.

"Just my luck, mates," he announced. "Too gol-dolled strong. Here, ketch hold of him an' run him along. . . . Dhrunk an' incapable—that's the lay, an' don't yeu forget ut. Up with him!"

They shuffled bridgeward, the fog hiding them. On the river the horns wailed; from the distant streets came the city's roar—muffled, discordant; far up the stage a bell repeated signals with the sobriety of a machine; but here, where they marched, was the silence of the vortex, the centre that hums with noises born in the void beyond.

They shuffled bridgeward, swearing at their luck, Norris trailing legs which obviously refused to carry him; his head bobbing stupidly now this way, now that. Indeed he acted his part to the life, and, when presently the men had smothered that tell-tale gash across the forehead with a rusty handkerchief, he would have succeeded in passing himself unquestioned to the cells in many a station-house.

"Fall'n down. Struck 'is bloomin' 'ed on a bloomin' ringbolt," the right-hand supporter proclaimed, as they encountered a stray passenger bound for the ferry.

"Drunk. Beastly drunk," said he on the left as the man moved on. "But, 'ee's our pal, an' we ain't the blokes to desert 'im." He leered horribly, aping the character of saviour.

"Get on!" Flynn ordered, "an' not so much talk. Where's them cabs set?"

"Top o' the bridge."

"Right oh! March."

They marched, Norris trailing limp in their arms, and came to that region where the trams circle and whirr into distance and space. Here they paused while Flynn went for a cab—a forlorn trio, repeating their formula whenever a sympathetic traveller happened to question. But in the fog and dank misery of the night few passers troubled them. They were all intent on getting home. It was eleven o'clock. Persons having houses to shelter them were hastening thither by boat and car. Persons lacking them had already filled the rookeries, the cellar dwellings, and had overflowed into the archways and yards left unsearched by a kindly and not too-inquisitive constabulary. Like rats they had crept into their holes, but unlike rats they lay shivering for day. On such a night even the city's lavatories were fully tenanted.

A cab came out of the distant gloom and halted beside the trio. Flynn descended from the box, and with the trio got himself stowed from further questioning. They drove up town.

At a rollicking canter the horse swung across the Goree. Under a rain of blows it staggered and plunged up Brunswick Street. To the left here, as far as the Exchange; there to the right, up Dale Street, boldly past the Temple of Justice, whence that morning Norris had melted into the crowd; thence sharp by the left into Scotland Road and safety. For off Scotland Road, hidden from the multitude who throng it, lie the rookeries and dens of oblivion. Places of the city's vortex whence sometimes seethe cries, shriekings, and a case for the Solomons who sit in the Temple. Places whence emerge the light-fingered gentry; the heavy-fisted brawlers of sailor-town; the foul, oath-making fraternity on whom civilisation battens and looks askance; the women who walk our streets—our sisters, our prey, our sirens, our outcasts.

The streets sheltered behind the broad and ugly artery known as Scotland Road have many attributes; but the chief of them are these, and into some of them no constable walks alone.



A lashing Jehu, a horse panting up the fog-girt road, a voice giving directions, and presently at the edge of the curb a cab standing in the murk steamily acknowledging the end of a journey. The trio descended as they had entered, cautiously gripping the man who swayed. Flynn emerged, handed the Jehu his fare, and departed walking.

Up street. Down street. Court Yard. Alley. Terrace—No. 42. A knock. A door opened on the chain, a whispered conference, and Norris trailed legs over the sill of a hell not spoken of in polite society, unmentioned indeed in that history of all time we hold as holy.

The door of No. 42 Jimjam Terrace snapped over a bevy of damsels lacking timbrels and song, but bending over the man whose legs refused to hold him erect. They spoke a strangely coloured English.

Yet were they our sisters.

## ACT III.—THE SANDS OF DEE.

### CHAPTER XXV.

#### THE WINDS OF MARCH.

MARCH, with its cold winds and days of dazzling sunshine, lay over the city and river-lands, luring people abroad, and sweeping the roads in their faces. March, with a burst of wrath, rushing in with sleet and hail from the nor'-west, clean from the ocean; March, with a spell of mugginess, smoke, and damp, persuading the trees to unfold. • But warily in these northern tracts Dame Nature responds to blandishments. The trees were ready to break, the southern-facing hedges, far up on the hillside, were beginning to green, the trees in the Square—those left by the labours of the improvement committee—were showing signs of coming beauty; but for a month yet they would remain thus, putting forth fingers at a venture; sending out doves from the ark, only to retreat once more before the bluster of a gale and a lashing of hail.

Yesterday the Square dallied with the notion of a mirage as a novel effect; to-day it cowered beneath the blasts of a refrigerator. North or north-east—it mattered little where the thing actually came from—in the Square it met full-face all passengers, regardless of their direction. Paper, dust, the overflow of municipal carts, the laboriously collected heaps of scores of gaunt scavengers whirled skyward, found the climb difficult, and descended like sand in a simoom.

And, amidst the bluster, the roar of the city droned

unceasingly. Trams whirled in a cloud of dust, scattering the paper like snow from the mouth of a refrigerator; cabs clattered, men leaned back clutching their hats, women struggled with skirts twisted and clinging to them like the robes of a Nautch girl; and at the approach to the Square carters cracked whips over teams sweating up the steep streets, dragging trollies laden from the docks. A ceaseless jar of sound echoed, the voice of a city making its way heavenward, up into that island of blue, a moment stationary over the Town Hall.

Callaghan sat at breakfast reading his letters. The noise invaded the dusk of the high rectangular room he occupied, shaking the bobbed fringe dangling from grim cornices, shaking the archaic chandelier poised with five arms spread to catch flies, jostling the cheap china "ornaments" lining, like a regiment of soldiers, the mantel-shelf. It set the crockery dancing on tray and marble-topped chiffonier, and persuaded some blatant fruit and amazed birds, standing perkily at attention under tall glass shades, to attempt the impossible in perpetual motion.

But Callaghan sitting there, and now lighting his pipe for a smoke, took no heed of it. Apparently he was engrossed with his letters, sedately solving the relative advantages of a trip to Italy and the lakes, or a run up the Nile; but at the back of his mind lurked annoyance, ruffling, the calm surprise of a strong man brought to bay by a sudden gap in his relations with friends.

A week had passed since the trial, and Callaghan was free to go whither he listed. He had emerged scatheless. No word of blame had fallen his way, and his directors, jubilant of mood, had voted him six months' leave. He had sent a note up to Norris telling him of this, and asking for a meeting, but no reply had been forthcoming, and Callaghan argued pessimistically from the silence.

The people at the Cottage, despite their kind speeches when he saw them after the trial, blamed him for the result of it. They avoided him. Ethel, Helen, Arthur, all of them, it appeared, were content to remember only

his defence and to forget that it had been forced from him by Arthur's tactics.

It had come to this in the course of a few days' consideration. He felt aggrieved at their lack of discrimination,—at Arthur especially, after all that had passed; and now Callaghan leaned back in his chair puffing at his pipe, and contemplating the twin attractions—Italy or the Nile—unharassed by noise, unmindful of the simoom.

Italy he had promised himself more than once, but Italy in March seemed scarcely enticing. He had seen snow on Vesuvius in that month, and had some knowledge of the winds. He desired warmth. The Atlantic gave him all he required in the way of bluster. The sun, the exhilarating dryness, the cool comfort of nights spent in the land of the Pharaohs, was intensely alluring. He would not take the beaten track either, but would go, as he had been accustomed to go all his life, as his own dragoman. Cook was all very well for those who had never travelled, but for him—he dismissed the notion with a cloud of smoke.

Assuan, Phylæ—before it was gone, Luxor, and the Soudan held him, as always they had held him, entranced. Then, too, there was the barrage—that wonderful production of his countrymen in the heart of the desert,—Englishmen at work there ready to greet him and glean the latest intelligence of the land they loved, and knew only through the spectacles of editors brazenly announcing conflicting opinions.

Egypt had it. Easily it came to the front when memory drew the pictures. He had friends among those clean-faced overlords bossing the fellaheen in Nile-land; men he had met on his voyages and seen away into the shadows beyond port hail, out of the devilry of Port Said and Cairo, up among the airy flats and desert, up again amidst the farther hill-country,—men who had made names for themselves, and who would hold out the hand of fellowship for the sake of those old days when he and Norris had cruised together and stared into the violet depths which had swallowed them.

Norris.

Precisely. His friend's name fell across the pleasant picture and caused him a moment's pain. He shrugged his shoulders. "Poor old chap! wonder when he's going to look me up again!" The words passed through Callaghan's mind, and for an instant there appeared a note of anxiety; then came the solution, allaying curiosity. "Suppose he thinks me a beast, and has done with me." But he shook the notion off with his accustomed sanity, and settled down to the itineraries.

The Nile had it. The allurements of papers descriptive of things he knew was unnecessary to bring him nearer this decision. The Nile had it from memory, from a desire to see again a country where Nature goes slowly one gait, and fogs and gales and the clash of cities making money come not. The sun, too! He glanced out of window, and saw the grey-white smudge doing duty over the farther chimneys, caught a glimpse of reams of paper scarecrowing heavenward, and sat himself down to write. Egypt had it. The Nile! He leaned back to consider the methods of approach, P. & O. or Overland, and again the window rattle took him from his task and set him searching the Square. A line of cars was whirring sedately past, wires who-o-o-o-ing, gongs staccato—the street about them blurred with a rain of dust. One drew up at a stopping-place, and a lady descended. The car plunged on, leaping like a switchback, and the lady, now seriously reminiscent of somebody, drew near, shielding her eyes with one hand.

Callaghan rose and stood watching. "Gad!" he announced to the room at large, "It's Helen. What's she landing here for, if she's bound to Liverpool . . . and again, "Phew! what a smother."

The dust swirled high, and when presently it had cleared Callaghan saw from his vantage-ground at the back of the room that Helen was mounting the steps before his door.

He hastened in some wonder to admit her, and opening wide, heard her say as she struggled with a hat designed for peace—

"Is Arthur here?"

"Arthur? No; isn't he at home?"

Callaghan stood in a whirl of grit holding the door and screening his eyes as Helen paused a moment, downcast at this intelligence.

"Hasn't he been here—at all?" she questioned again.

"No. Come in, . . . you see, I supposed he was at home; won't you come in? I haven't seen him since the trial."

She entered, lifting her veil. "Nor have we," she announced briefly, "and I think it is time *some one* made inquiries."

Callaghan, rather abashed at this plain speaking, found his tongue with, "Evidently . . . Can I help?"

"Why should you? Arthur is not a child."

"Scarcely—yet . . . By the way, though, have you seen Harrod? He went off with him, you remember, before I could do anything."

"Yes; and to-day Harrod writes over asking *us* to tell Captain Norris to call. *Us*—as though we kept him away."

It was plain to see that Helen was annoyed. The dark, strong face spoke eloquently of the attitude Miss Douglas had assumed. Arthur Norris, child or man, was missing. That at all events was evident. He was not staying away from the Square in pique or disgust—he was missing, and for a week this had gone unnoticed.

Callaghan recognised the urgency of the case immediately, and there followed at once the query arising as sequence in his mind. He glanced at the gentle girl figure before him, now so strenuous and alive, saying, "I sent a note to him; didn't he get it?"

"I suppose not; we forwarded it to his hotel."

"And—what does Ethel think?"

"Ethel? Oh! that is the bitter part of it," came quickly from lips which had never before spoken harshly of her cousin's wife. "Ethel does not think. Ethel is engrossed; she is persuaded he is with you, as he has been before. Ethel is—Oh! Captain Callaghan, we are drifting—drifting, and I am afraid."

He saw the quivering lip and moved slightly towards

her, holding out his hands, seeking a distraction. "What have I done," he questioned, "that it should be 'Captain,' after these months—years?"

"Well—but . . ."

"But what?"

"Oh! You must think me a nuisance—we are always in trouble; always pestering you, . . . you must . . ."

"Beautiful women are rarely considered nuisances by mankind," he assured her gravely.

"From which I may infer that if we were old," she flashed, "and . . . and . . ."

"Finish it, Helen."

She looked up with a sudden tremor and flushing brow. "Can't, Dick," she faltered.

Callaghan reached out and took her hand.

"It was my fault for putting it so crudely," he decided. "A man should help his friends—may I help you?"

But she drew back; a recollection of that week lost, that week wherein he had not ventured near them, again prominent in her mind.

"No; why should you be tied? You have other things to do."

He moved to the table and brought some of the itineraries to light. "Yes, a trip to the Nile. I have six months' leave and have just arranged it," he assured her.

"Then go," she decided; "it would be sinful to keep you."

"And what will you do—how will you set about finding Arthur?"

She stood a moment looking out at the whirling dust, her foot beating impatiently on the carpet, then faced about, crying out—

"See Harrod, I suppose, and go to the police, and—and . . . oh, what do women usually do when they have no men to fall back upon? Do the best we can."

Callaghan took the letter he had just written and tore it across. The itineraries he gathered carefully in a sheaf and with the letter placed them in the fire.

## A Conversation in Cook Street. 211

"There," he said, quietly, "I am not going to Egypt—and if you will not let me help you I shall act alone."

He left the room and some minutes later returned with hat and coat, to find Helen tugging at a veil which apparently had become twisted in the elemental bluster of the streets. She looked up smiling, a pathetic and beautiful figure, unheroic, not anxious to fight out alone this issue, but anxious only for the man who had become so involved in their lives that, seeing him willing and not careless, it seemed iniquity to flout him.

"Oh! but it isn't fair," she said. "It isn't—it isn't. You have other things to do. Why should your holiday be spoiled by our vagaries?"

"Imagination!" he smiled. "Why do you prophesy my holiday is to be spoiled?"

"Then you have decided to—to forget my horrid speeches?" she fenced a trifle hurriedly.

"Imagination again, Miss Helen," he announced brazenly. "Once you assured me you had none. I ventured to doubt it, and now, if you don't mind, I doubt it still more. Come, I propose Liverpool."

"Then you weren't huffed?" she threw out swiftly.

They descended the steps smiling and faced the simoom.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### • A CONVERSATION IN COOK STREET.

They came to Woodside and paused a moment to visit the hotel at which Norris had stayed. The manager met them, plainly in some anxiety. The captain's room was locked, he informed them. The captain had not been seen since he left early on Wednesday morning. The hotel people supposed he had gone home or was with friends. It had happened before—would they desire the door opened?



Callaghan decided the question off-hand, and persuading Helen to rest a while in the coffee-room, passed upstairs with the manager.

This personage, a German wearing glasses and flaxen hair over a large pink face and grizzly moustache, decided rather gloomily—"Zat it look ugly. One neffer knows," he added, pausing a moment to stare in Callaghan's face, "vot might happen to a man with the gaptain's demperament; but I do not antecebadde drouble for there haf been no noise—no sound, loog you, notting, only ve see the gaptain no more; still, anysings might haf happen . . ."

Callaghan acknowledged it without speech as they crossed the landing.

They searched for keys, and presently found one that opened; but the door fell back on an empty room, with a manager peeping cautiously for events. No bullets, poison bottles, nor any sensational evidence lay before them to boom a sleeping hotel into life—nothing but poor Norris's unlocked bag and some garments littering the chairs.

"So! he is nod 'here—zat is evidend—alzo zat<sup>o</sup> he to redurn indended, blainly."

The manager moved about, ordering servants and recording his opinions in the voice of one to whom no happening can come amiss; agile, effusive, gazing owl-eyed through shining spectacles. He had scented perhaps an inquest; saw himself now a witness, hugely calm in court, and reported in the papers as one to whom the mysterious episodes of hotel life are bagatelle, occurrences of the hour. But Callaghan scarcely noticed him. He was occupied putting together the letters and papers he found, glancing them through and placing them under lock in the bag. This accomplished they descended at once and found Helen ready in the vestibule, anxiously scanning their faces. She looked up as Callaghan joined her, saying swiftly—"Nothing? No, I thought not. Well, now we can hope."

They left the hotel, and crossing the river took the cars to Exchange, and thence at once to Harrod's offices.

The little grey-haired lawyer with the unemotional face, busy as he was at that hour, came tiptoeing from a board meeting and found a corner for them in a small anteroom. Here they sat down, and Harrod, his face of greeting changed to the face which listens to incidents in the lives of clients, sat sphinx-like while Callaghan made his report.

"Missing, eh?" he remarked, when the strands were fully gathered. "Hum, not seen since he left the court with me? Difficult position for a quiet man, eh, Miss Douglas? Well, well, I don't think we need be anxious." He drew a sheet of paper to him and commenced to write, talking as he proceeded. "Norris is too good to play the fool—in *that* fashion. A nervous, high-strung type—the very antithesis of his father, by the way, a man I knew well in the 'Sixties and looked up to as the modern generation do not look up to their seniors. . . . No—not the sort to make a hash of it, I should say—still, missing . . ."

He placed the note in an envelope, and, touching a bell, sat with pursed lips till a clerk appeared, then leaned forward—

"Give this to Harrison and tell him to take it round to Hooker & Sands at once; then telephone to Dale Street and ask them to be good enough to send up one of their best men."

He turned to Helen.

"Any picture ready for our show this year, Miss Douglas?"

Helen replied that she had been too much occupied lately to think about painting, and that if Arthur failed to return she would scarcely have the—— and halted plainly on the verge of tears. "You see," she proceeded more steadily and controlling herself by a strong effort, "Ethel had so relied on Captain Callaghan knowing something that it has come on me rather suddenly. A week has passed—a whole week and there has been no word."

"That very fact tells in his favour, Miss Douglas. People don't get lost, in these days, nor does anything happen to them, without our hearing of it, thanks to the

Press. Besides, I am in touch with this kind of thing. I should have known. But if you don't mind listening to a few rather straight questions, I can give you the latest news from headquarters; or, if you prefer it, I will speak from another room."

"No, no—you need not spare me—I am strong now," she said.

Harrod touched a bell and took up a receiver.

A moment later a one-sided conversation commenced in the small and dimly lighted room.

"I am Harrod, of Harrod, Brocker, & Spain—who is that?"

A nasal sound like a gramophone twanging at an immense distance made answer, and Harrod resumed—

"Ah, yes. Good morning. What have you in your reports?"

"Dr . . . er . . . cazu . . . dr . . . dr . . .," said the telephone.

"Eh—No . . . Waterside?"

"Dr . . . r . . . sz . . . bur . . ."

"Man?"

"Ez . . . Dr . . . dr . . . dop . . . dz . . . cahm . . ."

"Dark or fair, . . . height, &c.?"

"Dr . . . z . . . nz . . . dz . . . dp . . . dz . . .," the instrument stuttered lengthily, in a small nasal voice, recording hieroglyphics, and Harrod bending over the receiver heard the news with a face of stone, saying simply, "When?"

Helen watched him, fascinated by the twanging suggestions. Arthur was drowned. No, he was not drowned—he had been run over—he was dead—he was alive. She felt the cold thrill of suspense. It was torture—torture. Then suddenly, as it seemed out of the throat, came that distant voice, in answer to Harrod's question—blurred, indefinite, shadowing the depths—"Oz . . . dr . . . z-z-z." And Harrod, bending over the receiver, "Ah, yes—no—just so."

Then replying to a further string of amazing sounds: "Yes, I wish you would."

"Cahn . . . n . . . z—Uop-pop-z-z-z-z . . ."

"Yes. At once, if you will. Thanks. Good-bye."

Even now, as he stooped to replace the receiver, Helen fancied it would be possible to read something of what lay behind the mask; but Harrod turned to face her wearing the same air of grey placidity, elbows on the arms of his swivel-chair, pince-nez slightly awry, eyes unreadable, that he had lifted when he offered another room. Yet in the interval he had spoken with men who had described the wastrels from the city's pit, and with the same calm lips he was speaking, this time to Callaghan and herself.

"No," he said, "they have no news—for us."

Then addressing Callaghan more pointedly—

"By the way, what were you able to do with M'Gee?"

"Nothing."

"I feared so. Hum—how did he take it?"

"Explained that the matter was not a private loan, but a loan made by one of his companies. Rather a Spenlow & Jorkins argument, I fancied. Still, I may be wrong."

Harrod took no notice of this. He leaned over and made a note, then looked up to say, "Well, I don't know that we can do anything more just now. I have sent for the police, and will put the matter in their hands; also I will see about advertising and all the usual inquiries. So, if you will go round to Dale Street and give a description, I think we shall be able to put a finger on our young friend before long." He rose and held out his hand to Helen. "And whatever happens, Miss Douglas," he urged, "don't give up your painting. They have put me on the hanging committee; and if I can manage to effect the changes we desire, I think by a little judicious squeezing there will be more room this year for outsiders."

Helen smiled, and passed out. Then in a moment Harrod had Callaghan bending over a document.

"M'Gee's decision will make it difficult at the Cottage," he suggested. "Did Norris know?"

"Yes, I told him."

"Unavoidable, I suppose?"

"Unfortunately he insisted."

"When?"

"The morning of the trial."

"Psh-h-h!" Harrod breathed, but from lips that made no sign. "Well, good-bye. Get rid of Miss Douglas, and let me see you after lunch. I may have news."

Callaghan faced him at once.

"You have news now?" he suggested.

"No—only surmise."

"Can't I do anything?"

"No—er—it is too late. . . . Get rid of Miss Douglas," he replied, and vanished through the board-room door.

Callaghan rejoined Helen in the outer office. He would have gone to the police-station alone, but she insisted on accompanying him; and there, standing in the clean, airy charge-room, gazing at rows of handcuffs and placards announcing rewards, listening to the unimpassioned voices of the men who safeguard our movements, she heard Callaghan describe her cousin, helped with details, and came once more into the blustering March day, undismayed, unastonished—prepared at length for all things.

The roar of the streets absorbed them. To Helen it seemed a fitting accompaniment to the incidents in which they moved. Arthur had vanished at a moment when Ethel needed him perhaps more than ever before. Helen recognised the danger of that new friendship, born, as it were, in the shock of a collision on the high seas; acknowledged the entrancing art that drew them together, and knew her impotence. Arthur had vanished. Somewhere in this wilderness of bricks and mortar, amidst those charging cars and the racket of the city's heart, he had passed into the unknown and left them desolate. What had conspired to bring this about? Was it fate? Did fate interfere still in the affairs of men, or was it chance, luck, the thing of which every one prates with so little wisdom?

A motor came jarring up the street, running the gauntlet of other traffic, and advertising its prowess on a blatant horn. Callaghan turned and caught a glimpse of the occupant as it raced by—M'Gee. The man of millions, wrapped in furs, impassive to the city's uproar, blind to the city's wastrels. Callaghan lifted his hat and

Helen bowed, but M'Gee rolled on, waving a hand, immense in the knowledge of the power of money, pointing to the necessity for advertisement.

"That man annoys me more every time I meet him," Helen decided as they passed on to the Exchange.

"I confess, from what I know of him on the *Sentinel*, I thought he would act differently," Callaghan replied.

The sombre offices, tall and exceedingly massive, leaned out of the smoke regarding the rush and hurry with faces of benignant indulgence; faces grey with age, time-worn, somnolent. A life apparently had gone astray. A small man had gone down that a greater might acquire artistic treasures for his palace on the Wirral. Well, it had happened before.

What did it matter? A life the less to jar the pavements bordering them; a foot the fewer to scrape and tear at their foundations! Life? Of what account was life? Was there not deep within these walls the germ of further life; further production of this money-grabbing horde? Men toiled for this thing. When they had it they said it was luck; when they lost it they decided it was Fate. Was ever anything more ridiculous? The streets looked down on the shuffling crowds at their feet, and acknowledged the supremacy given them by man. They stared at the cars, prancing, crowded with passengers, saw the downcast horses juggling with ponderous loads, iron feet slipshodding on the slimy cobbles, driven by the whip; they marked the anæmic slave girls shuffling hither and thither in the crowd, laden with work for the shopkeepers who bled them, saw the great man go by, Mercedes carrying him, and seemed to smirk at the honour he did them. They reproduced his gleaming presence in their windows as he flashed.

Life? It might go, it might come. The barefoot seller of matches in the gutter had no opinion of it—he only cursed the rut in which he moved. A string of mutes passing in a solemn line amidst the plunging roar, dodging in and out the crowd, carrying advertisements shoulder-high on iron collars; the touts, the pirate-music sellers, the cheap Jacks raving themselves hoarse, had but

one word for it all—hell. That was the only definition they knew.

And through it Helen passed with Callaghan at her side until they came to the landing-stage. Here<sup>o</sup> he stood a moment watching the trim girl figure that had come so seriously into his life, watching the placid eyes, dark in shadow, all lights in the sun, that looked up so trustfully to his guidance, and heard her say, "May we expect you to tea?"

It was though she knew that Harrod had persuaded him to get her away that he might explain the meaning of these nasal twangs listened to in Cook Street.

From the manner of Callaghan's reply it might have been a command that had passed Miss Douglas's lips.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

• VERLASSEN. •

Far up the hillside, reposing snugly amidst the trees and greenery, Heath Cottage scarcely felt the blustering gale. High amidst the elms the rooks acknowledged their danger, fluttering ceaselessly from swaying nest to bending bough, and crying mournfully of the risks they endured. But the house standing on the slope of the hills made light of it—it was sturdy, clad in budding creepers, thick-walled, solidly roofed, and when the sun peeped through the split clouds low down over the Hoy-lake flats it seemed to smile in the yellow glow that fell upon it.

It was in this mood when Callaghan turned into the door after his interview with Harrod. Near the porch stood a motor car, in the window-seat Helen<sup>o</sup> watching the approach. She rose at once on seeing him enter and was at the door, holding it open on his arrival, her question framed rather than spoken.

Callaghan shook his head, smiling at the quick welcome she found him. "No," he said, "I have no news."

"Then Harrod was mistaken?" she flashed, watching him.

"If he suggested anything to you—yes," then again answering her deprecation, "No, you may rest assured. I have seen it."

"Then I am thankful. Come in. Yes, Colonel Marchmont is here. Come in."

They entered the drawing-room, and Callaghan caught a glimpse of Ethel sitting at the piano, music in hand, and Marchmont bending over. She rose at once and advanced to meet him.

"I am so glad to see you, Dick—why, you are almost a stranger, . . . and—and have you any news, the smallest scrap? I thought he was with you, you see, . . . but now . . ."

Again Callaghan shook his head over a negative.

"And Harrod knows nothing, nor Hooker & Sands?" she persisted.

He repeated his announcement like a child going through its lesson.

"No one has seen him as far as we can discover at present."

"But you have hopes?"

"Oh, yes."

Ethel's lips fell into line. For a moment there dawned a look of incredulity, but it passed. She stood passive, silent under Callaghan's steady scrutiny.

The wind moaned about the walls and gables of the house, playing disconsolate music in the dim yellow light. It entered the chimney, and sent a gush of smoke and sparks out upon the hearth, then lapsed suddenly, as though satisfied with its efforts.

Ethel took no heed. She was looking through the windows at the swaying trees, listening to the rustle of the ivy-clad walls. Her face was white and set. Calm was the predominant feature, yet there was a note of strained anxiety in her eyes that gave the lie to the words her lips pronounced as again she glanced at Callaghan.



"So have I. You see 'Wolf!' has been cried before. One gets injured in time. It is, I suppose, what the colonel would call a natural law."

Marchmont came forward on hearing the sentence and shook hands with Callaghan.

"Glad to see you again," he said. "And sorry to hear your report—still, no news is good news always. I have tried to impress that view—not as a natural law, perhaps, but as an axiom worth remembering. Mrs Norris seems inclined to resent it."

He spoke in his usual light and vivacious manner, emphasising his remarks by little gestures and movements of the brow, without which speech, with him, seemed impossible.

"Not at all," Ethel returned, her accent again bright and self-confident. "I merely wish to point out that it is rather a worn statement—but I am sure you are all dying for tea, and I am simply starving."

"Result of the ride," Marchmont laughed. "There is nothing like motoring for the appetite. One gets perfectly wolfish."

They drew round the fire, Helen, Ethel, and Callaghan finding comfortable seats, Marchmont standing warming his back and holding his cup.

"I ran over to-day," he remarked, addressing Callaghan, "to persuade Mrs Norris to take up the leading part in our concert on the 26th. I am one of the committee, you see,—Wirral Choral Society,—and almost at the last moment our contralto has failed us. Flu'. Not likely to be about for a month yet—and I want Mrs Norris to take her place. I wish you would try to persuade her for me. You too, Miss Douglas."

They both assured him they would do what they could, and he rattled on.

"You see it will be an awfully good introduction. The girl who was to do it is a pro., of course,—but she hasn't the voice Mrs Norris has,—and if we could only arrange it, I believe, as M'Gee says, there would be money in it."

"What is the piece?" Callaghan questioned as a pause fell on this statement.

"'The Swan and the Skylark'—Goring Thomas, you know,—a wonderfully luscious bit of work, and a miscellaneous programme for the second half."

"I am afraid I ought not to sing," Ethel remarked thoughtfully. "I should like to, of course—but . . ."

Marchmont swallowed his tea and crossed for a further supply.

"There is no 'but' in the case," he returned gently. "No sugar. Cream. . . . Thanks. I should consider it an obvious flouting of opportunities, and so will Captain Norris when he returns, if you don't take our advice. The fact is, you simply must help us, or we shall come a cropper."

"I think it is I who am likely to come a cropper," Ethel smiled. "Oh, it is difficult—very difficult."

"My dear Mrs Norris," Marchmont put in more gravely, "I think you lay too much stress on—on this unfortunate episode. Depend upon it, Norris will be back and with us again presently. People don't disappear these days—unless they wish to. He will be back long before the concert comes off. Come, may I not have my answer?"

"I long to sing. I should love it—I should . . ." Ethel commenced, then halted stammering.

"Sing then," Marchmont interjected almost passionately, "and leave the rest to me."

Ethel glanced at her friends, but seeing no advice in their eyes, temporised. "Very well; I will if I can."

"Unfortunately it must be Yes or No," the colonel informed her smiling. "You see there is not much time. We are——"

"Very well—yes," Ethel decided, setting down her cup. "I will sing if they rave."

"Thanks. That is settled then; and if I may run away without appearing rude, I will get off at once and see Brooks—the conductor, you recollect—and make final arrangements."

Ethel gave her hand, and he bowed over it, expressing his delight. "It is awfully good of you—many, many thanks."

Callaghan accompanied him to the door, and as he

slipped arms into the big fur-lined coat he said jerkily—

"It looks ugly, I fear? Yes?—um! I thought so. Well, she must not know it if we can help it; and, in any case, work is the best medicine—eh, you agree?"

"Undoubtedly, provided of course there is no risk for Mrs Norris."

"Risk?" Marchmont echoed, standing quite still in the act of settling his collar. "What do you suggest?"

"Nay; I think we need not put it in words, colonel. As a man of the world you will recognise that the position has its dangers—for her."

Marchmont stood on the verge of speech. He desired to give rein to his thoughts, but withheld them, glancing at the door, his face eloquent of defence. Then taking a rapid turn up the hall, he faced Callaghan, and said, "What will be their position if he doesn't come back?"

"Straitened—undoubtedly."

"And you ask me to stand aside—not to help in the only way in which I, as a man of the world, may help her! Psha! my friend, aren't we rather overstraining our national characteristic?"

"I am remembering she relies somewhat on my advice; and—I am very anxious to put this before you with all delicacy—Mrs Norris is a pretty woman. She will not be a beggar. Harrod tells me he holds all her husband's securities, also that he executed a codicil in his wife's favour only the other day. S-s-s-t! we can't stay here talking, or they will suspect something. Good-bye. Give me a call if you are passing."

Marchmont wrung his hand. "Believe me," he said with strong feeling, "I respect your motives, even as I respect Mrs Norris."

Two minutes later Callaghan re-entered the drawing-room alone and found Ethel in Helen's arms. He would have withdrawn, but she rose, and facing them, said swiftly—

\* "You must think me a brute."

"On the contrary," he answered her after the first startled theory, "I think you are very plucky."

"Plucky!" she reiterated, suddenly passionate. "Is it plucky to do what one can because one must? Or is it only plucky because I am a woman and it runs in the face of all convention? A woman who is deserted may sit and work socks or altar-cloths for her livelihood, and be patted and purred at by the Church; but a woman who is deserted may not use the gifts God gave her because, forsooth! she is a woman, and Mrs Grundy has her eye on her."

"No—no," said Helen. "I don't think Mrs Grundy is quite so powerful now, nor do you; but I can't help thinking it rather a pity you are so much with Colonel Marchmont—especially now. No, dearest—hear me out. It is only a little, tiny grumble—but a motor is so conspicuous, and people *do* talk so horribly, and I *do* want you to be careful just for your own dear sake—there, you ren't angry, are you?"

"Angry?" She caught her round the waist and kissed her brow. "Such nonsense. A woman who is deserted can't afford to be angry with her friends. A woman whose husband has told her that he is tired of her and has taken himself off is . . ."

"Stop! Stop!"

Helen was very pale. She half rose, glancing at Callaghan for support, then went on bravely—

"I think you are wrong. I don't think you should say it. Arthur has not deserted you. I am certain of it."

Ethel, suddenly calm at this announcement and flushing painfully, challenged at once.

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know!"

She turned with an imperious gesture to Callaghan.

"Do *you* know where he is?"

"No one knows."

"Very well, then—~~isn't~~ isn't it plain?"

It seemed necessary to present the alternative, and Callaghan did it with what softness he could muster.

"One hears sometimes of enforced detentions, Mrs Norris."

"Enforced detentions! You mean he is . . .?" she commenced, and paused, again crimson.

"I mean nothing that I do not say," Callaghan reiterated. "I have no more idea what has become of my old friend than you have, or Harrod has. He is missing. That is all we know yet; but I don't think you should assume that he is intentionally staying away—at all events, until there is some definite proof of it."

She heard his rather stern exordium to the end in all calmness, then rising once more moved across the room, glancing over her shoulder.

"You are as bad as Helen, Dick," she smiled. "Don't you think I have learned something in all these years with my husband, gained an inkling into his nature, gathered, perhaps, a suggestion or two? Nonsense! Arthur has made it plain even to the comprehension of my friends that he is tired of me. Tired! It is an ugly word for a wife to glean." She moved towards the piano, her dress rustling about her tall, slim figure, carrying with her the scent of violets. "A very ugly word for Mrs Grundy to discover. Come, . . . let us have some music."

She seated herself on the stool, and turned the pages of a song standing on the desk; then glancing over her shoulder said—"This is rather a fine thing—dear old Bohm!" with the discriminating air of one who is accustomed to sever music from commonplace tune. She commenced to play the sombre chords of one of Bohm's saddest songs, and a moment later the rich young voice rang out, thrilling, unexpected, pathetic—

"Verlassen, Verlassen, Verlassen bin ich,  
Wie ein stein auf der Strassen, kein Dirndel mag mi . . ."

Callaghan shivered. He glanced at Helen, and saw her lashes wet with tears. Looking swiftly, deep into the room, he caught sight of the girlish figure sitting there on the stool, proclaiming her own conviction, proclaiming it in the dim light to her friends. But the tension was short—so great a strain could not last. The music

abruptly ceased, and Ethel rose and left the room without a word.

Through the open door came the sound of her hurried flight, and the voices of the children playing in the nursery fell sharply on the swish of silken draperies.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CALLAGHAN DEFENDS.

A brilliant morning. The sun shining brightly on dusty roads, scarcely any wind, and the plover dancing skittishly behind hedgerows bordering the fields.

Friday, the eighteenth of March, had dawned with the promise of heat, and now, at eleven o'clock, the Wirral lay in a languorous haze, with a notion of thunder brooding over the distant city.

It was shortly after this hour when Marchmont, breakfasted and at his ease, skirled in from Deeside, sitting in goggles and plastron beside his chauffeur. They coughed swiftly down the roads, leaving a cloud and an odour for the villagers to assimilate; then, entering the more crowded thoroughfares, came at less speed to Birkenhead's masterpiece, and drew up with a bur-r-r at Callaghan's door. Marchmont ascended the steps, touched the bell, and a small maid appeared.

"Captain Cagalan? Yes, sir, sure-lye, 'ee's in 'is room."

The throbbing magnificence of the car, seen now for the first time on what may be called terms of intimacy, threw the girl off her balance. She forgot the slowly acquired instructions of her mistress labouring amidst potatoes and cabbage in the basement, and bursting in upon Callaghan, announced a visitor in gasping accents. "The gent from the motor, sir—to see you, sir—hif you please," and vanished in open-mouthed shame.

Marchmont stalked in smiling, self-possessed, and quite unconscious of the flutter he had produced. He dis-

covered his friend sitting calmly amidst the early Victorian treasures of a stuffy lodging-house in the heart of a city justly considered squalid, and resented the environment with a scarcely audible "Psh-h!"

Outside the sun shone, heat radiated from pavement, trams whirred; inside, Callaghan faced him rising from a chair. On the wall, immediately overhead, reposed a cynical study of "The Square at Omdurman"; on the right an opinion of "Rorke's Drift" leaning bloodily from its peg; and the sun, throwing long beams, revealed the dust shimmering slantwise across the room.

Marchmont advanced, extending his hand. The exclamation died on his lips, and convention stood firm.

"'Morning," he remarked. "Can you spare me an hour—half an hour, if you like—anything, indeed, in the shape of it?"

"I rather expected you. Glad to see you even in this chaos," Callaghan announced. "Won't you slip off your coat?"

"If I'm not keeping you. Gad! Yes; it is hot."

"You aren't. My morning was beginning to drag. What is it?"

"Two or three things," Marchmont made answer, patting his coat in search of a parcel and a packet of letters, which he presently withdrew and placed on the table. "Two or three things. All of them rather important, and one interesting. We will keep that to the last, eh?" He struggled out of his coat.

Callaghan smiled acquiescence.

"Right," said the colonel, who, like many men, usually aimed to fill whatever room he sat in, and made a hasty exit if another genius appeared. "Right; I agree—especially as things which are labelled important are generally disagreeable business affairs, which we hurry over as fast as possible; at least, that is my method."

He stood with his back to the fire, hands behind him, negligent of the chair Callaghan had drawn up, and looking down at his companion's easy posture.

"Very well; we will get rid of them. Number one," he pointed to the bundle of letters lying before him. "I

have a note there from M'Gee. Need not open it. I am very fond of M'Gee—but he has his limitations. I shouldn't, for instance, accuse him of philanthropy—not of the spontaneous order, at all events. He looks before he leaps. Keeps his hand on the pennies while he is investing the pounds; yet, in a word, that letter gives me to understand that his office holds a mortgage on the *Coorong*, and that he has not foreclosed.

"I came on this quite accidentally the other day, and I asked him if it was true. His answer is, that he is foreclosing. Well, now, I don't want to appear inquisitive, but I have heard that Norris was interested in his ship, and . . . You see I don't know anything about the financial position of the Norrises, whether they do hold shares in this vessel, or whether they will be hurt if my great relation shuts down; further, I can't ask them. So I ask you. You know them well enough—have known them for years, can you find out for me? . . . er . . . it's a bit delicate, . . . but . . ."

"I need ask no one," Callaghan returned, breaking in upon his apologies; "the fact is, I had it from Harrod a few days after Norris disappeared. There is a largish sum involved—probably . . ."

"Never mind figures."

"Good—some thousands."

Marchmont whistled.

"Harrod says it is assigned to Eth . . . to Mrs Norris along with the rest."

"Assigned, eh?—poor chap. And not worth the paper it's written on, I suppose?" Marchmont threw out.

"How can it be? there is no *Coorong*."

"But they hold the shares?"

"Unluckily, and if M'Gee forecloses they must sell the Cottage. That is obvious," Callaghan decided.

Marchmont fingered the edge of his waistcoat, going carefully past the thin curb he wore. He seemed inclined to whistle.

"I can scarcely understand a man acting quite like this," Callaghan resumed, and paused examining the other's face.



"Seems to be the usual method in business," Marchmont commented, still busy with his waistcoat.

"I couldn't use the money. It would seem to me like the price of blood."

Marchmont came back from his reverie. "True," he said; "by Jove, yes. And Harrod has all details, eh?" He fussed with the letters, turning them over, examining the addresses. "Pish! Devilish risky form of speculation—shipping," he commented, lifting his head. "I never touch 'em. Leave that sort of thing to M'Gee. He thrives on it, somehow."

"Precisely," Callaghan returned with an inflection that brought Marchmont's quick eyes out of the haze they were searching.

"Eh—eh—what's that?" he cried. "Rank heresy. And to the brother-in-law of the genius in question, my dear man!"

Callaghan smiled at the outburst. "Well," he suggested, "what shall we do—see M'Gee together?"

But Marchmont, as far as Callaghan could read it, had suddenly lost interest in the thing. The mention of thousands seemed to have clinched matters. He moved about the room pishing at the notion. He informed Callaghan that a man of M'Gee's type was not often visible when philanthropy was in the air, and turned, ruffled and abrupt, to the consideration of Norris's disappearance.

"Any news at all?" he questioned. "Any hint?"

"None."

Marchmont struck an outstretched palm smartly with his fist.

"By Jove!" he cried vehemently, "it is caddish, despicable. I am amazed."

"If you mean by that," Callaghan returned with swift precision, "that my friend is missing of his own free will, I agree."

"If! What else can you make of it? and it is not the first time, remember."

"The first? Afraid I don't follow you."

"He deserted his wife when his ship went down. Deserted her—you can call it nothing else. He, a man of

intelligence, breeding, and all the rest of it. A man who can write, by Jove, like a poet. It is nearly incredible."

Callaghan faced him quietly. He desired this opportunity, perhaps had led to it. He rose and stood leaning against the edge of the table.

"Have you never heard of a momentary lapse of strength, of nervous breakdown?" he questioned.

"Yes, certainly. But I don't see how it applies here."

"Because you don't know Norris, . . . because you aren't in touch with him and are ignorant of his history."

Marchmont made no comment, but his expression betokened incredulity.

"Years ago," Callaghan went on impressively, "my friend was burnt out of his ship—saved, as they say, by the skin of his teeth,—that was the beginning. Later, he was attacked by malarial fever; later, he nearly came a cropper in Backstairs Passage. That seems to have been the final blow, and the voyage succeeding this trouble I cut him down. In four minutes, as he says, there was no ship under him. Come, Colonel, you must admit that there is a possibility of nerve trouble following all this."

Still there came no sign of acquiescence on Marchmont's part. He did not deny it, but, on the other hand, he did not appear willing to accept it as exoneration of Norris's action.

"I often think," Callaghan resumed a trifle bitterly, "of the placid indifference meted out to men of the sea who have come a cropper. You see our great ships orderly and spick and span, you see us marching the bridge apparently unconcerned, but you forget that ships are brittle, that hazards are everywhere; and you forget the nerve tension induced on some characters by the constant strain of command."

"We are playing with fire, my friend, we are holding a candle to the magazine. Ships are too complex, speed too high, signals and methods of signalling archaic. Harrod was right when he threw the onus of these things on the Board of Trade, but that has not saved Norris. Ship-owners thrive, the sailor goes under. Norris has gone under in his fight to make money for them—that is

Marchmont came out of his silence saying emphatically, "Jove! I like your reasoning—I like it, but—if you had seen that poor girl yesterday, as I did, I think you would be less inclined to defend your friend. Why, it will be the talk of the town in ten minutes. It is the talk already. 'That Mrs Norris, you know, dear,' he paraphrased, sinking his voice, 'who was deserted by her husband, . . . ' and so on, and so on. The damned purring cats! Tcha! I have no patience with him, none."

"Deserted? Nonsense. I stand by my friend."

"It does you credit."

"I stand by him because I have known him since he was a boy of thirteen," Callaghan announced somewhat sternly. "Norris is not alone to blame; there is a trifle in the other scale as well, but I do not propose to adduce it. I have known them both for years. You can't blind me. And latterly I have seen Norris a great deal. He has sat there in a chair, bent over the fire, praying for a chance to redeem his name—for an opportunity to prove to men he is not the coward his action suggests. He loved his wife. I could say more, but I don't think it is necessary. Still, if you desire proof, I must refer you to Harrod. A man does not leave himself penniless if he intends to desert. He usually does the other thing."

"You are sure of this—certain?" Marchmont questioned, calmed by Callaghan's plain comment.

"Absolutely. If he is alive he hasn't a farthing to buy bread."

"Then I withdraw my remark. I beg his pardon—come, you and I must not quarrel over this; we must find him. What are you doing?"

Callaghan replied that, acting on the advice of the detectives, he intended to search the hospitals and, if need be, the workhouses.

Marchmont immediately offered to accompany him; but, noting his companion's quizzical look, added, "Of course, if it is agreeable to you?"

"I should be delighted," Callaghan returned a trifle

slowly, "if it were only to prove I have no animus; but, to tell the truth, I have arranged to take Miss Douglas—and . . ."

"Not a word," Marchmont interjected. "Indeed, now I think of it, I shall scarcely find time within the next few days. However, that clears the air; now we can talk in peace." He came forward, and, taking the parcel in hand, unfastened the string. "This is a manuscript—Norris's work. The last thing he wrote, so Mrs Norris says, and I have been looking through it."

Callaghan stared.

"You see," the Colonel went on, flattening the folios out with his hand, "Mrs Norris came across it locked up in a bureau in her husband's room. It evidently was returned some time before the trial, and was put away pending the answer to a letter which Norris wrote concerning its rejection. The answer came a day or so before the trial and was placed with the MS., doubtless with the intention of going into it after the case was done with. Well, I happened to hear of this when I was at the Cottage, and I asked Mrs Norris to allow me to look it through. You see, rightly or wrongly, God knows which, I am very anxious to do something to help Mrs Norris. She has no idea how to proceed in an affair of this sort, and it seems a pity to allow a thing which may be valuable to lie idle just now. So I took it away with the understanding that if I thought well of it I was to consult you and see about getting it published. That is why I said a while ago I couldn't understand Norris playing the cad: the man has high ideals. This proves it," he patted the manuscript. "You follow me?"

"Readily. But, with regard to publication, I know nothing—I scarcely see how I can help."

"You can agree with me that the MS. had better not be put back in the bureau," Marchmont suggested, fixing his eyeglass and letting it drop again. "Look at this letter. It is from Shackleton's—the people who published his first book. They aren't fools. Depend upon it, Norris would have sent it out again; but look at their letter."

Callaghan took it up and read as follows:—

“DEAR CAPTAIN NORRIS,—We handed your questions to our literary adviser and he replies as follows:—”

“‘I have no quarrel either with the method or the subject-matter of this book. It is ably and artistically done. The author has succeeded in producing a wonderfully vivid picture of life in the conditions he describes, and is a master in the art of descriptive writing; but I am bound to say, for your guidance, that I do not consider it a book likely to command a large public. It is the novel which a man who has won his spurs may write with acclamation, but not the novel to catch the public ear. And that, in my judgment, is an essential for a new writer.’”

“To this we may perhaps add that, having read the book ourselves with very great pleasure, we find we are compelled to decline it, solely on the ground pointed out above. In fact, the lack of feminine interest, added to the present congested state of the book-market, constitutes so severe a bar that we can do nothing else. We shall, however, be very glad to read any other work from your pen.—Faithfully yours,  
SHACKLETON & CO.”

Callaghan glanced up from this with an exclamation of surprise. “Jove!” he said; “but it seems to me that Shackletons are duffers after all.”

“Not a bit,” Marchmont corrected, swinging his glass, “just business men—nothing more. They are concerned in pleasing a certain section of the public—the section which has taken to pap and piffle, as a certain lady has taken to a certain soap, and will have no other. Why, if they went in for literary stuff, they would find themselves in the bankruptcy court in a year.”

“Then Norris went to the wrong shop?”

“Of course he did. His first book was a failure because of it.”

“Well, but do you know what to do—who to go to?”

“Why not? Music and painting and literature go hand in hand. I love them all, and have dabbled a little myself. Besides, what is more to the point, a friend of mine is the head of a very big house—a house that pub-

lishes this kind of thing—so, if you think I may approach him without waiting further, I believe we shall not only be helping Mrs Norris, but doing what her husband would himself have done had he remained here.”

“Tell me what is the proposition?”

“First, to get this,” he tapped the MS., “typewritten. It’s no use as it is. Second, send it to my friend’s house with a note asking for special services, and get it set up in time for the autumn sales.”

“Yes; but it is a costly business, I gather, and *may* not bring in the shekels. Mrs Norris could scarcely stand any great outlay.”

“Did I say anything of Mrs Norris?” Marchmont questioned a trifle testily.

“No—but . . .”

“Tcha! my friend, there are plums here. Do we usually give plums to the publishers if we can afford to hold the dish ourselves?”

“I see—you will do the financing, is that it?”

“Precisely.”

“Very well, Colonel; then you have my consent—provided you allow me to go halves.”

“Tcha! why should you? It won’t hurt me,—pardon—but what is the use of being rich if one mayn’t help one’s friends?”

“And what,” Callaghan rejoined smiling, “is the use of being ‘without incumbrances,’ as they say in shipping circles, if I may not join in the plunge?”

“Very well—if you make a point of it.”

“I do. I shall be glad to assist, for I have heard something of this novel before, and it cut me that I was unable to offer any suggestion.”

“Oh—how was that?”

“It was the night Norris failed to turn up at your dinner. He was here, waiting for me, on my return. Miserable—almost heart-broken—at his lack of success, at his inability to prove to people that he was not a fool despite his confounded nerves.

“He walked about the room, sat by the fire and brooded, giving me little glimpses into the worries that were racking him; told me that the reason he did not

join us at dinner that night was because he had discovered that M'Gee held this mortgage you have spoken of; and, finally, blurted out his disappointment over the rejection of his book.

"Poor old Norris! He only wanted a bit of luck to make him brilliant—and now . . ." Callaghan rose and took a cigarette. "Now I must get over to see what fresh pool can be dragged to find him."

Marchmont gathered his papers.

"Gad!" he said, "I came here swearing at Norris."

"And now?"

"Well, 'pon my word—I am almost inclined to pity him."

"And I," said Callaghan, as they left the room in company, "can only wish the desire had come earlier."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE CALL OF THE BIRDS.

But there came days when the remembrance of Norris's past was sunk in the knowledge of a present, existing and forceful; when from Helen, Callaghan learned something of the tension which had been so evident during those days preceding the trial.

Over and over again in little asides and suggestions, as these two walked and drove from place to place in Liverpool conducting their search, Callaghan heard the voice which had proclaimed to him Helen's conviction of the position as she saw it days before the trial commenced. "It is preying on him—absolutely sapping his strength." And the memory of his rejoinder came back to tantalise him as he walked there searching the crowds for a glimpse of his friend, "I wonder if that is so?"

I wonder!

Well, he no longer wondered, unless perchance he mar-

velled at his own lack of perception and grasped the fact that in this matter of intuition women stand on a pedestal far lifted from man. Intuition? The thing is an instinct, evolved, who shall say through what slow processes of torture and degradation? and now grafted firmly on the tree of character. It is part of the mental equipment of women, and it came out here in this time of stress and anxiety. Helen made no boast of it. She did not allude definitely to the fact of her prescience, but all her energies were directed to the one solution. Arthur was not in the river. He was not to be found in any dredgings or scourings of the sea or foreshore. He was simply missing. An accident had happened, and he would be found perhaps in hospital, perhaps even in some workhouse ward. They must search.

So they passed to and fro about the city highways, examining those places where men are taken in to be doctored and patched for further service, and came out once more impatient, as far as Callaghan was concerned, with the police and its theories; annoyed with Harrod, who would have had him move in other circles; angry, indeed, with all offered suggestions which did not point the way Helen led.

It had come to this in the course of their wanderings. Helen, the girl of soft speech, sympathetic insight, and gentle movements, led the way. That they moved haphazard did not appear. That they stood sometimes searching crowds which never could have held Norris was obscured. Helen desired to sift the group, and they sifted it. It was nothing to the knowledge that they were side by side,—Helen looking up for advice, Callaghan giving it; Helen triumphant in her defence of Arthur, Callaghan admitting he had sinned in omission.

There were days when, under the strain of this companionship, Callaghan would have put all else aside and risked his momentary happiness on the question men ask of the women who have enthralled them; but not now. To do so would have been to obtrude the ego: it would have savoured of weariness in this quest she held so resolutely as her own. So Callaghan walked beside her, enmeshed



and ever blundering more deeply in the coils with which his path was strewn.

One morning he awoke with the knowledge, that the quest was over. The sun streamed in upon him. Through the open window came the roar of the trams and the clamour of vessels moving in the haze down there on the glowing river. But the sun's rays found no response in his heart. It might have been foggy, raining; the world was dull, prosaic. Helen would no longer accompany him on his marchings. She had gone back to comfort Ethel and to work at her paintings, while he was under orders for "a holiday." This was the last tyranny of Miss Douglas—of Helen.

Well, what was there for a man to do? Obviously nothing—smoke, read, kill time. Callaghan resented the hypothesis to which his reasoning carried him. There was nothing to do; could be nothing; never again would there be anything to do. On that point he was decided. He lay staring resolutely at the window.

And from the trees across the Square came the song of a blackbird whistling to his mate, "Helen—Helen! . . . Helen—Helen!"

So the notes got words for him and beat in his brain, sounding the changes. He turned wide-eyed to search this miracle, and decided his dreams had brought him madness. Then again came the voice calling, "Helen—Helen!"

The words rushed in upon him, thrilling to rouse him. He turned to shut out the song; but it pierced the coverlet, and found him breathless.

He rose and closed the window, and then discovered that he waited for the song.

Again he rose and opened it. The song and the sun streamed in together.

No more sleep—no desire for sleep. A mad longing to walk, to plunge on and on; to search the heights, to plumb the depths; to whisper, to listen, to sit still and dream.

Not Callaghan this—not the man of strong endurance, plain speech, and rather stern bearing. Another had

usurped his being: in part it was woman, in part man; but the woman triumphed, laughed, and bid the man climb down—down to his knees,—and having got him there, womanlike, desired him to stand.

This Callaghan? Scarcely, yet had he lain down Callaghan. It was memory haunting the man—memory whispering of yesterday, telling him of missed opportunities, of slipped moments, of . . .

Memory informed him he was a fool. He acknowledged his tameness. The woman told him he was brilliant. He caught a gleam of mockery in the words. Memory refused to attest it.

And all the time the blackbird sang. Liquid notes poured from his throat, made mock of the man with that name of names—Helen!

Downstairs the workaday world greeted him with a note he had learned: breakfast was burnt, the coffee thick, the eggs chiselled by the mason who provides tit-bits for a railway bar.

But this was no bar. There lacked the gracious condescension of the Hebe attendant, yet Callaghan was perhaps more kind than on days when the cooking was unimpeachable.

From across the broad roadway came the song of the bird, calling to him, bidding him go, and his mind fell swiftly upon the vision that had accompanied him so long. Tall, dark, gentle, soft of speech—could he? . . . dared he . . .?

He sat back in his chair, fingering an unread paper, staring through windows obviously sullied. The vision oppressed him. He rose, and went out to walk in the Square.

Nine o'clock—ten—eleven, and on the stroke of it the apparition of two small children at his door. Their pose suggested the Norris infants. This impossibility was equally absurd. Callaghan walked swiftly down the gardens, and as he approached his door opened and the pair disappeared.

No birds singing now. Only the prosaic world before him, alive with electric cars and the hint of further

trouble. He came to the house and let himself in, entered his room and closed the door. Jacky and Claire faced him, red, crammed with importance.

"If you please, Captain Cagalan," said Jacky, with a strong effort at enunciation, "Aunty Helen wants you to come up and see her."

The song broke out again, triumphant, alluring.

"Oh, but she didn't say so," Claire admonished. "She didn't say anything about anything . . ."

"No; but she's crying, and . . . and there's a man in the house what won't go away," Jacky asserted, defending his position.

Callaghan came back to sober fact. "A man?" he interjected. "What sort?"

"One wiv dirty hands and free rings, and so we fought you ought to know," said Jacky, kicking heels in a chair too high for him.

"Quite right—quite right."

Callaghan, no longer seeing visions or hearing songs, left the room, and presently reappeared thrusting arms into a dust-coat. He looked very stern; but he only questioned, "And where 's Mummie?"

"Gone to pwactise for her concert in Colonel Marchmont's motor," Claire announced, smoothing her dress over the edge of her knees, "and so there was no one else. But, I must say, it was not entirely my idea to come for you, for Jacky fought it would be best too. You see, he's somefing like a sailor, and his cuffs are simply disgraceful."

Callaghan moved towards the door, holding it for the pair to pass. "Come along, then," he said; "we will run up and see what he wants. Which shall it be—cab or the cars?"

"Cab!" they decided boisterously; "then one of us can sit in the miggul and look over the doors."

"Good; cab it is, then. Hi, there!" He hailed a passing hansom, and in a few minutes they were whirling up the Square, Jacky triumphantly elbowing the doors.

Trouble sat lightly on these two. The loss of the

*Coorong*, their toys, and Mr Calston all weighed at first; so, too, when dad had seemed "so funny," and at length ceased to come home, the pair had gone hand in hand about the house and grounds, quietly, with strained faces and preternatural gravity, until, with the lapse of time, had come forgetfulness, the witchery of new games, and they were again the buoyant, lighthearted pair of pink shrimps known on the old *Coorong*. But with a difference. For now it was dad who was gone—dad who called them his kinders, found shillings for chocolates, and was able to ride them together pick-a-back down the avenue. At the moment, however, even this knowledge escaped them. They rode in a hansom, staring at the streets, important of mission.

The cab moved rapidly up the slopes approaching Noctorum, and presently deposited its fare at the gates of the Cottage. Callaghan, marshalling the two children, entered the drive, and, having traversed half its length, came at the bend upon Miss Douglas. She advanced swiftly to meet him, and, without a word of greeting, despatched the pair to the nursery.

Plainly Miss Douglas was perturbed—perhaps angry. The song of the birds had a new motif. They chirped, fighting over a worm.

But Helen stood in the drive, white and scared, her breast heaving, her eyes searching the shadows thrown by shrub and tree. Callaghan took her hands in his as though he would shield her, as he had shielded her since sunrise; but she allowed him no time for speech. She broke in swiftly—

"I couldn't think where they had gone. They had no right to call you."

It was the new motif still—the chirp of sparrows.

"But I am glad to come," he returned. "You see my rooms are stuffy, and I am thankful for the excuse. Where is this man? How has he annoyed you?"

"Annoyed? I am not annoyed," she told him, striving tardily for release. "It isn't fair to keep you here. You have other things to do."

"The man, Helen,—where is he?"

"I have sent him to Harrod," she answered, brought to bay.

"That will cost money, and I could have settled him for nothing. What did he want?"

She obtained her freedom, and stood with her back to the light.

"What do we all want?" she fenced, breathless.

"Money," he decided promptly.

She made no answer, but a thrill ran over her. She shivered as though suddenly cold.

"And he demanded it?"

She nodded assent.

"Why?"

"He is one of the crew of the *Coorong*, I gathered. He lost his clothes, and demands compensation."

"Had you any trouble? . . . Did he go to Harrod easily—readily?"

Callaghan paced to and fro the gravel walk as he had paced the Square; but keeping near, searching the trees and shrubs with his eyes. He could not comprehend Helen's manner. She seemed to be holding something back, something she feared he would discover. A pleading gleam came into his eyes as he paused again and half sternly reiterated the question—"Did he go without any trouble? Tell me, Helen."

She came swiftly to him at this, holding out her hands. "No, Dick; he didn't go readily. Perhaps he didn't go at all. I told him to go, and he went up the avenue swearing. It was horrible; . . . but— . . ." she paused abruptly, and put one hand on Callaghan's arm—"but it isn't fair to monopolise you in this fashion, I want you to take your holiday. You were going. You only stay because of our troubles. Won't you go now, please?"

Callaghan took a long breath. The sun shone. The bird's cry was the cry of his heart; but he said, "And that is the only reason you had for trying to hide this from me?"

She looked up, her face flushing swiftly at the tone, and nodded.

A blackbird tripped now in antiphone with his mate far in the branches overhead.

"Hear that bird, Helen? Does he tell you anything?" •

She glanced up, her face on fire. "They are building their nests. I expect he has found a straw," she acknowledged at random.

"I read it differently," he returned, still watching her. "I think it means that he is proud of having won so fair a bride, and he tells her so with all his heart. He can't think of anything else. The sun crosses the line in a day or two—but he cannot think of that. It is bringing the spring to England—spring after the rains and chills of winter—but he cannot think of that. He only knows that he has won his bride, that the others are beaten off."

Miss Douglas seemed to lose interest in bird-land; she said definitely—"I do wish you would go for your holiday."

"Truth, Helen?"

"Truth, Dick."

"Then I shall not go," he announced abruptly; "at least—not until you order me to go for another reason. Will it please you to be told that I like to think myself indispensable?" he asked with that new note in his voice which Helen had just discovered.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't be true."

Callaghan came nearer and stood looking into her eyes—"But it is true," he insisted, speaking rapidly. "Mankind loves to be considered supreme, the one thing necessary and indispensable. All men are unanimous in this, perhaps because it implies that they are trusted. I don't know. But you trust me, Helen? You will leave me this one little bit of conceit, . . . you trust me. . . . Are you angry with me—are you?"

She glanced up smiling—a swift, shy look. There was no anger in those dark eyes, no distrust; but words would not come to help her. She shook her head, and

the blackbird, perched high on a greening elm branch, broke into song, looking down proudly on the straw he had fixed.

"Helen!"

Callaghan took her hands in his and waited.

"Yes, Dick."

"May I go on?"

Again the swift, shy look bidding him do as he would, the look that is seen only in the eyes of a woman who loves and is not afraid. Callaghan did not read it so. He caught it, registered it in his brain—but he did not grasp its significance. That only comes after, when the lights are dim, and we sit and ponder on the scenes in which we make or mar our lives. What he recognised was that this beautiful girl, who had cast her witchery upon him, was beside him, that he held her hands in his, and his pulses leaped under the influence.

"I can't go away, Helen," he answered again and paused.

She met his eyes with—

"Why not, . . . Dick?" And the name fell tardily, as an afterthought.

"Because you chain me."

"I?"

"You."

He let go her hands, and one arm stole about her waist.

"Oh—but . . . but . . ."

"Never mind but, sweet . . ."

Again the swift, shy glance as he halted, searching her face; again the swift attempt to shield that face, and a whispered word—

"Helena!"

He drew her to him. She did not answer. She did not resist. Only in her attitude was a signal he read aright. He held her firmly, his lips close to her small, pink ear—"Helena," he whispered, "can you love me?"

And the girl reaching up placed her hands upon his shoulders, and gave the answer he craved—"Yes, Dick"; then with a sudden catch in her voice, "Oh, I think I have loved you always."

And there was silence beneath the green old elms, silence and the movement of fingers caressing softly the curve of a cheek, until again the girl lifted her face, crying out—

“Oh, but you must go away. I ought not to have told you. You must go away.”

“Go away, now! Why?”

“Because . . . because—O Dick, you will hate me, . . . because I cannot marry you . . . and leave Ethel to struggle on alone. Because, you see, . . . if I did there wouldn't be enough pennies in the house to—to keep it going, and—you see . . . Oh, please let me go away and think what I ought to do, . . . do, Dick, . . . for I can't think while you hold me—I can't, . . . and I must.”

For answer he held her closer, and, bending down, touched the soft red lips so enticingly at hand—

“Is that all, Helena?” he questioned.

Her eyes said yes. She was breathless under his caress.

“No other reason? Nothing subtle, far away, in that pretty, dark head?”

“Nothing, . . . nothing,” she cried, nestling to him, hiding her face.

“Then I shall not go away. I shall stay and I shall claim you, and when I ask you for those pennies, you shall give them to me. Now need I go?”

From high above their heads came the blackbird's note—triumphant, liquid, thrilling with pride in that small form he saw perched and swaying on the bough of a silver birch.

And from the path beneath once more came the deep tones of a man's voice saying caressingly, “You are not sorry the children came for me, Helena?”

And the girl's reply—softer in tone, more tremulous—  
“No, Dick. Why? . . . Can't you see I am glad?”



## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE MAN FLYNN.

Like the blackbird, Callaghan had won his bride, but unlike the bird he could not at once begin to build his nest. The children an hour or so later gave him the reason why.

Jacky met him at the nursery door when at length Callaghan found time to enter. He was riding in great glee a headless horse and flourishing a tin sword in pursuit of a retreating enemy.

"I gived him bell-tinker," he announced bloodthirstily, "and if he comes again we will knock seven-bells out of him—won't we, Claire?"

"You will. I'll see you," said Claire.

She munched a chocolate, ostentatiously holding the bag to the friend who had brought them.

Callaghan shook his head and drawing them apart closed the farther door. He sat down near the fire, Claire at his knee.

"What sort of man was it you saw with Aunty Helen?" he questioned.

"A dirty man," said Claire, without hesitation.

"Somefing like Mr Flynn, only it couldn't be Mr Flynn," Jacky decided, helping himself, "'cause he had a beard all round. We 'cided that 'fore we came."

"Flynn, eh? Hum! . . . Well, and what sort of a beard did Flynn wear?"

"A little bit on his chin wiv shaved cheeks on Sunday," said Claire. "But it wasn't Mr Flynn, because she knew us, you see, and he didn't."

"I see. Yes, . . . and what did he say?"

"He asked for mummie, and Aunty Helen went to see him."

"Well?"

"An' then," Jacky chimed in, "Aunty Helen catched

us peeping an' sent us into the garden to play. So we comed down to you."

"Why did you come for me?"

"'Cause Auntie Helen was cryin'."

"What made her cry?"

"The man," they supposed in unison.

An hour later Callaghan had crossed the water and interviewed Harrod, but the lawyer had seen no one, and when, later in the day, Callaghan called again, Harrod could give him no better information. "But," he decided, as the captain waited anxiously, "I think it would be wise to get a man in the house. It is lonely up there, and the grounds make it extremely accessible to the out-of-works. Better put the police in touch with them, eh, what do you think?"

Callaghan promised to see to it and questioned him as to his theory of the affair.

"Theory? Well, I have not much to go upon. It may be Flynn, of course. He seems to have vanished since the trial. Still, one sees no object."

"I don't agree. My notion is that Flynn is in touch with Norris, and his object may be blackmail pure and simple."

Harrod acknowledged the possibility as being remote, and again urged that the police should be put in touch with the facts.

"Of one thing I am certain," he announced, coming out of a lengthy silence. "Norris is not in the river, nor is he in any of the known dens. It is possible, just possible, he may have gone away to get rid of . . ."

"And deserted his wife as a side issue?" Callaghan interrupted a trifle hotly.

"I have seen such cases," the lawyer acknowledged, bending his head. "One has to admit the possibility."

"I, for one, will never admit it," said Callaghan. "I would as soon credit Ethel with a wish to desert her husband."

He crossed the river in some anger. Lawyers and police were alike in one thing. They have no faith in any

reading they might make in character—there were always asides, shibboleths garnered from their experience of the dregs of mankind, from the wastrels with whom they came in contact.

Norris was not of these. He was not a man to shirk his responsibilities. Callaghan decided it as he passed up from Woodside. And now he must give the Cottage over to the hands of these people with their foregone conclusions! At that moment Callaghan felt distinctly ill-used. If any one could guard that house and those two fair women surely he was the one to do it. He decided to go up and see Ethel after tea and make the suggestion, then, coming into his rooms, found on the table a telegram from Ethel in which she had anticipated him. It said this—

“Delighted to hear the news. Come up to dinner and arrange stay the night.”

Then Callaghan dressed and packed his bag in supreme content with the world and all its methods of annihilating time and space.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### “THE SWAN AND THE SKYLARK.”

“’Twas at thy door, O friend, and not at mine,  
The Angel with the amaranthine wreath,  
Pausing, descended, and, with voice divine,  
Whispered a word, that had a sound like Death.”

The days passed, and there came an evening when an angry sky lay over the bronze hillside. Green, red, yellow, mauve. Straight wisp-like clouds with upturned, bristling tails. A thin and fleeting scud. The Dee like a molten bar against the glooming mountains—mountains of purple that leaned astride it, immense in their power to order its

And across the hills, playing with the greening shrubs,

dallying with the soft young gorse, a gentle breeze breathed straight from the purple sea. The giant and the fairy, and as the fairy passed the giant shivered, and metallic rippings ran down to the edge of the gorse.

So the day waned.

Ethel was radiant to-night. Excitement and anticipation lay on her like the filmy silver on her dress, sparkling, iridescent. Dinner was over. The Cottage fires burned high. The rooms were brilliant with light—light from the fires, light from the lamps, light from candles poised daintly beside that cabinet where gleaming china and bric-a-brac took up the note and flashed it back on gleaming candlestick.

Here was Helen, her neck and shoulders white against the soft black gown she wore, a Lancastrian rose nestling at her bosom, touching the whiteness with its fragrant lips,—a rose from Callaghan. Here, too, were Jacky, spick and span in velvet and lace, and Claire, dainty as the little elf she aped, bright of eye, gold in her hair, ready for the unwonted treat in honour of Mummie’s *début*.

Here, too, was Colonel Marchmont, eyeglass, white waistcoat, immaculate shirt-front, and the sombre garb of gentility, all complete; but Callaghan was not here. He had been bidden to dinner, yet had he not come. Not even Helen knew why.

“Five minutes past seven,” Ethel announced, glancing again at the clock. “Helen, have you two had a tiff?”

“No, sweetest, not the least wee tiff. Oh, he will come—he will come.”

“Plenty of time,” Marchmont acknowledged. “I can run you to the Central in five minutes, . . . if there are no police about,” he added, smiling at Ethel’s negation. “After all, we motorists are up to be shot at—a conviction more or less makes no difference, eh, Miss Douglas?”

“And you a magistrate!” she laughed, playing her fan. “Well, never mind; you suffer in very good company.”

“Wish I could sit on my own case all the same,” he acknowledged.

"Why, what would you do?" Ethel asked, drawing his eyes from Helen to the tall white figure beside him.

"Give myself a new car out of the fines-box," he decided.

"That's gweedy," said Jacky; "you have two alweady. Two's enough."

"Captain Callaghan! Captain Callaghan!" Ethel admonished, tapping the floor. "Oh, what it is to be a man, and indispensable. I would give half my life to be a man for the remaining years."

"Why not all, dearest, while you are about it?" Helen purred at random.

"Because," came the half-passionate reply, "because that half was happy—happy—oh, too happy to think of changing."

She moved across the room and stood opposite a circular mirror let deep into a massive gold frame. With one hand she replaced a little stray lock, with the other pressed in the pins. The transition was so sudden, the outbreak so unexpected, that a hush fell upon the room. It was easy to see the girl was excited. Her eyes pointed to it, did any one require proof—the colour in her face, her instantaneous replies. And now she stood there, arms lifted, her full bust and snowy neck outlined against the further wall. Her hair gleamed in the firelight, gold with coppery touches in the coils; her arms took the glow of a lamp-screen blushing rosily near at hand, the sheen of her dress, mauve-tinged and scintillating with points of silver, caught a hint from the fire and leaped responsive. She stood in Marchmont's eyes as Cleopatra to Antony of Rome, beautiful, seductive,—a woman to win.

All the afternoon Ethel and Helen had wandered the gorse paths on Bidston Hill. Ethel desired the tonic. She said fresh air would help her voice. So they moved about, and sat in the sun, gaining it until it was time to return and dress. In the interval the sky had taken to itself those shades of wrath Ethel had learned to know so well.

Green, red, yellow, mauve. Wisps of cloud, tail-tipped, like earwigs fighting an enemy. On the *Coorong* she had discovered their meaning. Anger was the word applicable

to them, and an angry sky made her shiver. Off South Cape she had seen such a sky; off the Leeuwin, that lioness of Western Australia; off the Horn, the Plate, in Channel,—anywhere in the rolling forties, and always they spoke the same language—storm, stress, fight, wind, rain, tossings, hazard. And now she was to sing in face of them, and Callaghan had not come,—Callaghan who, so she had decided, did not quite like the notion that she should sing at all.

"Why?"

A small toss of that glowing head, a tiny kick administered to her train, and Mrs Norris faced her companions smiling like the goddess of love.

"How quiet we are! Colonel Marchmont, don't look at your watch. You make me nervous. Helen, where are your wraps? you will want them in that hall."

"You, too," Helen reminded her. "The draught we get is nothing to the gale on the platform."

Marchmont rose. He was on tenter-hooks lest something should happen to mar the evening and cast a shadow on Ethel's *début*. He decided every one was getting jumpy, and proposed the only consolation. "We must get away," he said. "It won't do to stay any longer. Callaghan will drive straight there. What do you think, Mrs Norris?"

"Think? Oh, I don't think. I am in your hands. Order me! Order me!"

It seemed the only thing to do. Therefore, after the passage of some few minutes, the car took them masterfully down the drive, and, entering the still roads, leaped snorting on this first stage to the hall. But at the hall, though Callaghan had not arrived, a message waited for Marchmont. One of those small orange envelopes that carry matter out of all proportion weighty to the recipient.

The colonel opened it and read:—

"Sorry detention unavoidable. Bad news. Act as you think best. Shall be up later. CALLAGHAN."

Marchmont considered this missive a moment in

silence. "Bad news." Hum! that could have but one meaning. It referred to Norris. It might mean that Norris was found, or that Norris was . . . Fish! He put the thought from him. In that case, he decided, Callaghan would have been more explicit. Bad news! Well, it might mean anything. Confound the man! At such a moment to saddle him with the responsibility of—of God knows what.

He crushed the small paper and thrust it into his pocket. It was indefinite—and Ethel must sing. Without her the concert would be a failure—it could scarcely go on. Besides, there was nothing definite. It might mean that Callaghan had broken his leg—or . . . Heaven take the man! It might mean anything. Luckily the women were in the cloak-room. If Ethel saw the message she might refuse to sing and her opportunity would be lost. He decided, thinking hungrily of that beautiful face as he moved slowly up and down the ante-room, that she must sing and he would take the consequences. He desired to help her, to make life smooth for her—to take from her that burden she bore so bravely and to shut out the past. Only by work was that possible. And here was the opportunity for which she had prayed, and with it—what?

He drew out this flimsy thing that carried vague hints of disaster to sting her, and flattened it out to examine the post-mark. Parkgate. What in the world was Callaghan doing at Parkgate—that tier of barrack-like houses fronting the sands? The thing was unguessable. It was annoying, though, by its very vagueness. Vague? Good heavens! it bordered on imbecility.

Again he crushed the form and replaced it in safety, and as he did so the door opened to admit Mrs Norris and a bevy of the chorus all cloaked and brilliant in evening dress.

"Dick come yet?" Ethel questioned, approaching.

Marchmont confronted her smiling—

"No, confound him. Broken his leg I should think, . . . er . . . pardon, Miss Douglas. Don't look so shocked."

“Did I?”

“Horribly. But when he comes, talk to him. He deserves it.”

“He does,” said Helen, demurely.

Marchmont pushed fingers through his hair and laughed outright.

“Oh, if you take it in that way,” he admonished, “he will be out of hand in a year.”

The conductor joined the group at this moment, suggesting briskly that it was time to get into places. The hall was crammed, he told them—they would certainly enjoy a record audience.

Helen crossed over to her cousin and touched her lightly on the cheeks.

“You look brilliant, dearest,” she whispered. “Success of the very best kind—*au revoir*.”

She waved farewell, and passing through the stage door found her place in the hall and sat down. Callaghan’s chair remained empty beside her.

On every hand were friends smiling and chatting with friends; looking over the heads of people near to throw a glance at people more distant. The room was packed. The shimmer of dress, the gleam of diamonds, and the hum of voices was, perhaps, a little disconcerting in presence of that vacant chair; but Helen had long ago decided that the king could do no wrong, because of the simple fact that he was king. She had no fear, no doubt, only a strained sense of waiting and disappointment that he had been unable to come. And this sense was heightened when presently the orchestra rolled out the solemn chords which heralded the opening song in Goring Thomas’s sorrowing cantata.

“A Grecian poet I, but born too late :

For me no nymph sings from the upland wood  
Her antique song; nor in bright hurrying brook  
Is seen and lost her sweet illusive smile.

Gone is the shell that Phoebus, long ago,  
Strung for the music that should never die ;  
Gone is the shell whereon, sedately, slow,  
The comely Aphrodite floated by.



And gone the maids who ran the ordered race,  
Or stopped to bathe them by Actæon's rill,  
Narcissus brooding o'er his own fair face,  
And Echo laughing from the distant hill.

Only o'er sullen world of stock and stone,  
The ball of fire sends down his daily light,  
And when the measured hours are come and gone,  
Lake, field, and sky are lost in gloomy night."

The music of a master in pathetic harmony—sad, dreamy, thrilling the nerve-centres—rang through the hushed and brilliant hall. Then someone seated almost behind Helen said in a nasal drawl, "Horace Davy is in good voice to-night. Wish I could sing like that."

And there came the added comment, raised slightly as the orchestra marched through the initial strains of the opening chorus—"So he is; but I reserve myself entirely for Mrs Norris, and refuse to be led away."

"I prefer a man's voice always," said the lady of the nasal intonation.

"So you have remarked before, dear; but I wish to hear and see, this lady who has cast her spell on Barney."

"Barney seems to be all there, anyway."

"He always is when music is on the cards—Sh-h-h! they are beginning."

The voices were perfectly audible to Helen, one harsh and metallic, the other less noticeably so, but still hinting at the "head voice" so prevalent in modern gatherings. Helen found an opportunity presently to change her pose, and glanced around.

A full-bosomed matron, wearing a diamond necklet and some wisps of chiffon through which the pink skin peeped, sat back in her chair with closed lips. Beside her, on either hand, were two of the younger generation, a trifle more generously covered, and waving their fans of ostrich feather. One held a lorgnette, the matron a bejewelled "starrer." They were all strangers to Helen, but, as was evident from their allusions to Barney, knew Colonel Marchmont well.

The chorus broke voice with the death-song of the swan,

## “The Swan and the Skylark.” 253

And Helen's attention was again riveted on the platform. Here, on the conductor's left, sat the colonel, leading the violins in that magical maze of sound. Just above, and almost in line with him, Ethel stood, the first of a long row of altos, singing now in the chorus that wailed so mournfully upon them. And ever and anon rose the audible comments of the matron and her brood hovering critical in the background.

“That man sings flat.”

“Can't sing for nuts—never could.”

And the matron's iterated drawl—

“I am waiting for the Norris-woman.”

Helen refused to hear. She became absorbed in the fine harmony, and realised in a measure the feeling expressed as the voices filled the room—

“A lonely swan  
Warbled his death-song, and a poet stood  
Listening to that strange music, as it shook  
The lilies on the wave ; and made the pines  
And all the laurels of the haunted shore  
Thrill to its passion.”

There followed a tenor solo of solemn pathos, ending and blending into that magnificent chorus—“O life and love, Farewell !”

“Only to wake the sighs  
Of echo voices from their sparry cell ;  
Only to say—O sunshine and blue skies !  
Of life and love, Farewell !”

And then the matron had her desire.

A small stir on the platform, a slight move among the orchestra, and Ethel Norris stood forth alone to win or fail ; and Helen's pulses leaped with annoyance as the voice behind her whispered—

“Say, Mumsie, isn't she pretty ?”

And the comment added from the shelter of a raised lognette—

“You can bet Barney makes no mistake in that line. He's like that patent medicine. He touches the spot every time.”

The orchestra swung into a rippling metre, and Ethel's voice rang out clear, well-modulated, bell-like, speaking the words without effort:—

"Thus flowed the death-chant on ; while mournfully  
 Low winds and waves made answer, and the tones  
 Buried in rocks along the Grecian stream—  
 Rocks and dim caverns of old prophecy—  
 Woke to respond ; and all the air was filled  
 With that one sighing sound—Farewell ! Farewell !"

Beneath the resonant tones there marched the roll of the chorus, drum-like and intense. Not drowning the clarity of the fair young voice, but accentuating its individuality, pointing to the singer as the dominating factor, passing her triumphantly on to the solo motif,—

"Adieu, adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades  
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
 Up the hillside ; and now 'tis buried deep  
 In the next valley-glades."

Again the chorus took up the note, swelling it, strings tremulous, basses booming, and again Ethel's voice rang out clear and bell-like from the storm of sound echoing in the wide hall. She held her audience spell-bound, till at the end the sigh of delight broke into a tumult of applause, and Ethel, flushed and radiant, resumed her seat.

But the audience were not to be appeased in this fashion. Again and again, in spite of baton and orchestra, the cheers broke out until, in despair, the conductor signalled to the girl, and she rose, smiling in her place, and bowed, while the applause was redoubled in intensity. Then, and only then, was the conductor permitted to resume, and the soprano, a willowy matron in white and silver, allowed to commence her song.

It was a veritable triumph, and Helen was conscious of it. She knew by intuition rather than by observation that it was success—the success for which Ethel had prayed. She scarcely heard the comments ringing the changes behind. The music had thrilled her. The note of sadness was so predominantly a force that even the triumph of success scarcely reassured her. It was magnificent,

beautiful, she told herself; but the underlying atmosphere kept the tears in her eyes, nerves thrilling at the knowledge of all that had been, and now was.

A movement among the people sitting close at hand attracted her attention, and she glanced up to see Callaghan passing down the narrow passage to join her. It seemed natural that at this moment he did not smile. It seemed in keeping with the dominant chord in this tragedy that he should appear quiet and sombre; but her hand went out to meet his, and a quick look passed between them as he sat down. Then Helen knew that some other cause lay behind his attitude—something poignant, perhaps even terrible.

She shrank a trifle nearer as the strong young voice on the stage proclaimed—

“There is joy in the mountains! The bright waves leap  
Like the bounding stag when he breaks from sleep—”

and putting the feeling from her, said swiftly—

“Did you see Ethel, . . . did you hear her? Were you in the room?”

He replied quietly in the affirmative.

“Wasn’t she magnificent, . . . wasn’t she beautiful?”

Again he answered quietly, admitting the fact; and Helen, looking into his eyes, read there something that was not enthusiasm, nor pride, nor delight, nor anything in the language we speak that does not tell of sorrow.

“Something is wrong,” she interpreted, leaning forward.

“You have bad news—that is why you were detained?”

He bowed assent, and the matron with her brood took note of the facts in detail.

“Not—not . . .” came the faltering suggestion, “not . . .”

“Yes, dear—Arthur.”

She moved to him with a quick gesture of anguish, and again words fell upon the now-astonished matron and her nestlings—

“But not—not . . .”

Once more the soft slow answer from lips set in line and unmistakably stern.

“Yes, Helena, . . . on the sands of<sup>4</sup> Dee—down by Parkgate. . . . Cha! . . . We must get her away from this—at once.”

They moved towards the door through a<sup>5</sup> startled audience — Helen white, and leaning heavily on Callaghan’s arm.

## ACT IV.—A POINT IN SPACE.

### CHAPTER XXXII.

#### " GRADIENTS ON THE ROAD.

NINE months had passed, and over the Wirral lay the breath of an English summer—a day late in August, hot, calm, sultry, fragrant with blossom.

The giant townships bordering the Mersey simmered in the sun-glare. Smoke hung over them like the heat-haze above a desert, and for the nonce the city Arabs were the only inhabitants rationally clad. Mankind arrayed in flannel suits, high collars, and panama hats honestly sweltered at his work, driving quills and bargains; and the bars hummed in the effort to make him cool. Municipal watering-carts lumbered heavily in streets radiating heat. They flushed the gutters and splashed the trains of women clad for garden-parties but parading the pavements in search of attire. Browned necks were the order of the day; and if not brown, tattooed. At the moment it appeared that woman had a twin objective—she desired to stencil a pattern in red or brown upon the skin of her own fair shoulders, and she yearned for something marvellous in the way of hats. The pauses she made at the shops proclaimed the one; the lattice-work screening bust and arms revealed the other, but more discreetly.

Apparently all Liverpool and the major portion of the neighbouring towns were in the streets. Yet there were others to whom the streets appealed not at all. Up the hillside, amidst that borderland of gorse and heather.

beginning near Bidston and stretching, while man permits, to Thurstaston and the Dee, are sprinkled the homes of the well-to-do, the magnates of the city who drive or motor thither nightly from the hive; and here, still at the Cottage, were Mrs Norris, Helen, and the children.

The months which had elapsed since that night when Ethel had made her *début* and Arthur had been brought home from the sands of Dee, had been an interval of steep gradients.

Hope and fear alternated in Ethel's breast, sorrow and anguish: sorrow for what had transpired that night at the Cottage when Arthur came up to her room; anguish for the part she had played in it. Love? Assuredly there was love, otherwise would it have been impossible to weep, or plausibly to ape sorrow; but it was love of the kind that does not heroise the loved. Love of the stereotyped, ultra-modern fashion, which holds the man in chains for a space and permits him to drift—to seek, with the passage of years, solace and encouragement elsewhere.

The love that does not heroise is but a makeshift commodity at best, and rapidly fails. The essence of all love is worship. What man worships he must of necessity honour—if there be any meaning in our changing language; and, if he does not honour, then, without question, he will not perfectly love.

Ethel never wholly understood her husband: the dreamy faculty of the man irritated her, she criticised him. In her eyes the provocation most necessary to endeavour was criticism, not sympathy. She forgot, or she had never learned it, that the spur, the incentive, the one inalienable incentive to endeavour, is, and must be, sympathy. Arthur had developed nerves, that she saw; he had shown the white feather at a crisis,—the medicine for these things according to her lights was criticism. And now she suffered.

The pain which arises from a knife-wound is small in comparison with the pain which arises from a recognition of the might-have-beens. We do not always realise the fact in time. Ethel only realised it fully when that sad procession of events was passed, and the earth lay blanket-

wise on the husband who had won her. And then the knowledge was agony.

The horror of Arthur's return and the ensuing inquest was mitigated and kept in the background by Marchmont and Callaghan. As much for the love of Norris as for his stricken wife these two men took the matter in hand. A body recovered from the grip of the sea after long immersion is a thing for experts, for the coroner and his jury, and the eye of love is best content with memory; but the signals speaking to its identity can be handed, brushed and unblurred, to wife and friends.

And so, in the course of days, it got itself written out thus in the journals kept by officials unimpressed by the passing of another derelict.

"The deceased must at one time have been a tall, fair-haired man of slight but athletic build," and as such he was identified as Arthur Norris by his friends. Experts admitted this substratum; the rest, by reason of the long immersion, was silence, and would have remained silence but for the signals.

A husband's cigarette-case, silver, daintily embossed and marked by his crest, is known to the wife who gave it. A watch and seals which had been heirlooms of the Norris family could have been found on no other "tall, fair-haired man of slight but athletic build," than Arthur Norris aforesaid, who had since his marriage frequently worn them. Chance does not put the gewgaws of a known man into the rotted pockets of his double in order to saddle relations with the necessary proof. Obviously then it was Norris who lay at rest in the newly opened vault of his people under Bidston Hill, and any other theory was absurd.

Therefore, Ethel Norris went about the house clothed in black, and the refined face and beautiful hair took new attributes of beauty. Therefore, too, Jacky and Claire appeared sombre and pale in the garb we designate as mourning. And therefore, because of the opening visions of poverty and fighting looming so substantial on the horizon, Helen worked at her painting in the room she called her studio, and made impressionist studies of the Mersey with its



gleaming waters set against the purple line of docks and warehouses, and framed them for the shops to vend.

This was the first gradient, and it was very steep. The train, indeed, rolled perilously, and at times seemed near disruption; then came the law of compensations. A visionary's law this, irrational, but none the less a law because of its banishment from the plane of argument.

It works in many ways, without any stated intervals, and generally in dabs and hurry. At the Cottage it appeared in the guise of a lawyer one day—perhaps six weeks after Arthur's funeral. Harrod, the man with a face that told nothing, brought it, and Helen, putting aside her brushes in answer to Ethel's outspoken summons, came down to hear.

Again the gradient was steep, but this time it carried them upward—out to the high lands of security and ease—past the gate of jarring impecuniosity into the region where pennies are found sufficient for the day of disbursement.

Yet how, precisely, had this happened? Harrod probably knew, but not being at liberty to explain decided to be honestly vacant. He had received instructions from a client, he told them, who dabbled in these things, to take up the mortgage on the *Coorong* to the extent of the Norris's holding. He could not say why any man, not a fool, was prepared to accept a mortgage on a defunct property; nor was he asked, for the two women had no knowledge of the effect of company law, or one-ship companies, and dreamed of every issue except the one absolute and definite fact—that with the disappearance of the *Coorong* there no longer was a property to mortgage. Harrod was discreetly silent on the point. He expatiated on the pleasure it gave him at this juncture to be able to bring some ray of sunshine into the home; chatted with Miss Douglas on the personal pronoun as applied to art, and was emphatic in his praise of Ethel's rendering of that difficult part at the hall.

An able and cautious lawyer, Mr Harrod, of Harrod, Brocker, & Spain, a man who had not allowed the law to warp and cozen him until only the husk of mankind

peeped through those grey, steadfast eyes of his—a man who took an interest in the arts—music, painting, literature, and kept the dry chips of business for office-hours and the city.

He stayed to tea that evening and talked an hour with Jacky and Claire of days long sunk in the years, but with a verve and brightness that kept the children spellbound. Then towards six o'clock rose and crossed the lawn with Helen to make his way home. At the gates, when it was no longer possible for Ethel to hear, Helen put a question which had slowly assumed shape in her pretty, dark head—

"You said," she remarked, pinning him down to fact, "that a client" had taken up this mortgage—does that stand, by any chance, for Colonel Marchmont?"

"No—certainly not." Harrod, very firm and unreadable, emphasised the negative.

"Nor Mr M'Gee?"

"Mr M'Gee, unfortunately for us, is not a client."

"And you, . . . I suppose, do not happen to be Messrs Harrod's client?" The question this time came in detachments—a word here, then a sentence hurried, and the lawyer faced Miss Douglas squarely with—

"No, no. . . . I never do business with relatives. I daren't."

Helen sighed.

"At all events," she decided, "it is some one who has seen our danger, and I pray we may be able to thank him."

"Leave it at that, Miss Douglas—depend upon it mortgages are only taken up by men who know how to handle them."

"Yes, but to us it makes a difference of £10,000."

This was true. For had the money to meet Ethel's share of the called-in mortgage not been found, she would have been compelled to sell the Cottage to find the funds.

Again the gradient was steep. Morning—anxiety; evening—ease, security, the possibility of still holding the old home over their heads. Perhaps for the first time

since the night of the concert Ethel had given voice to laughter.

Again had the law worked for retrocession. Jacky and Claire sank under the blows of a prevalent malady then ragingly vigorous. Diphtheria claimed them, and for a while the pair lay between sheets mute and pathetic at the passing snows they could not enjoy. A home was found them for their convalescence, while uncouth workers from the slums far down by the river laboured at the drains and made havoc of the drive and lawn; then with the heralding of spring they came back, and Ethel resumed her work, gave lessons and sang at "at homes," while Helen plunged heroically into the business of impressionism as applied to colour.

The pictures found purchasers at the price required; but the price, seeing she had no name and was simply an honest worker, was small enough to bring dismay where in truth it brought visions of destiny.

Once a great man, an artist in a certain school, came to see the girl's efforts, and after a lengthy scrutiny found voice in that cryptic utterance of his, which grew more cryptic and masterful with each assertion—

"You paint too thick," and when pressed for a syllable of advice, laughingly rejoined, "Advice! oh, by all means,—go on, spoil paper."

Helen scarcely touched a brush again for a week; then a spirited sketch of a lighted slum down by the grey docks passed into the hands of a discriminating personage in exchange for fifteen silver shillings; and the brushes were at it with renewed vigour—painting thick, in dabs of colour.

But the sketch, magnified in size and importance, hung in a three-guinea frame in the sanctum of a maghate who rolled nightly home past the Cottage in a Panhard worth perhaps fifteen hundred.

So, too, with Ethel's singing. The value of an artist's efforts ranges in exact proportion with her vogue. Ethel had no vogue, but she had notoriety in another direction, and she could sing. When, therefore, it became known that Mrs Norris was going to be guests, the

acceptances were numerous and gratifying; but two guineas from the halls of a Nocturn magnate is not a lavish expenditure on the sacred arts, and cannot be termed quixotic; still, it was Ethel's honorarium, and for it had she not the privilege of moving in that exclusive set, of sitting sometimes at dinner with them, and buying frocks that would enable her to appear unashamed?

Two guineas! Well, and when you have admitted these things, did not the two guineas and the fifteen shillings go towards the payment of those slum-workers who reorganised the drains?

Marchmont and Callaghan viewed this phase with mixed feelings of despair and admiration. Callaghan from the bridge of the *Sentinel* saw it as heroism—the heroism of the cultivated and impecunious gentlewomen, our sisters, our cousins, our relatives in blood and kind for whom no soup-kitchen nor charity organisation is a possible aid. That an army of these people exist he was aware from his dippings into the various strata that crossed his path at home and in the States. Game little spinsters working out their destiny and their strength at the keys of typewriter, punching the signs at eightpence a thousand, nerve irritation bounding the while; sweet-faced women struggling with frocks and laces which the shops can produce, machine-made, for so much, reckoned in pence and farthings a yard; educated women for whom are none of the joys of education—without means, without ideas, without hope, but struggling in the race, fighting for life, and keeping a stocking against a state-aided funeral. All these had come before Callaghan, and as he paced the bridge to the annoyance of the officer in charge, they passed in mental review before him, and the thrill of desire, the anguish for the right of protection, held him as in a vice. There was no necessity, he told himself, as he had told Helen. But Helen's answer, with a gleam of the sweet face looking up to him as she made it, came out through the gale they faced, and left him thoughtful.

"Dearest, I can't leave Ethel yet—let me spoil paper, then perhaps I shall develop imagination and be great." And again, swiftly hiding her face when the thing was

out—"You would love a 'great' wife, too, would you not?"

The temptation of Eve was as water in the brook beside the ocean he faced.

But with Marchmont the case was more difficult. The gradients up or down, the law of compensations for or against, troubled him personally in no way. They were under the surface. His philosophy had never encountered them. He scarcely recognised their existence. For there stood the house: Ethel's, in her own right, and, now that the matter of the mortgage had been arranged, as he had been told, by some "philanthropic dabbler" in shipping stocks, there could be but little actual want. Nor was there. Any additional expense was felt—and it was to meet it that the two girls worked as he saw. He would have had it otherwise. Had he consulted himself alone, he would have gone to Ethel and begged her to come to him and rest in peace as mistress of the old Manor: but he shrewdly suspected that even if convention had not barred the way, Ethel was scarcely the woman to accept any man because he pitied her.

So he held back, and because he loved her gave no opportunity to those wiseacres who, having no other occupation, dabble in chatter over the tea-cups and spread alarming rumours from the veriest trifles of actuality. Besides, when you consider it, no man with any pretension to refinement will go open-mouthed within twelve months of a husband's demise and offer himself as substitute.

And, just because of these considerations, Colonel Marchmont remained in the background, hungrily watching from the slopes of Thurstaston the home nestling on the slopes of Noctorum, and waited, sometimes in breathless anxiety, the passage of time and events at the Cottage. There were moments, too, while the occupants of that shrunk homestead were wrapped in slumber, when Colonel Marchmont came down in his car, and halting it at the inn at Upton, walked up to go round the drive and assure himself the house slept peacefully. At these moments he hugged the ringing phrase that had escaped the hive anent the "philanthropic dabbler" who picked

up worthless mortgages on snips aerunct and rotting on the bed of mother ocean. And this, perhaps, is the only way in which the law appealed to him.

But there came a day when convention and all outside considerations were put aside; a day when the gradient was again steep for the Cottage, but on the upward, lifting side. Norris's book was out, and a chorus of praise acclaimed it.

Who of us having conceived an idea, watched it mature and put forth fruit, is unable to breathe the air of this man who had done so much for a friend? Which man of us is there who, having risked gold on an idea, can walk haphazard to the place where the tidings of success are considerations of practical value and announce them coldly, without emotion? No artist can do this thing. His temperament orders it otherwise, and Marchmont was an artist.

Therefore he came down to the house near Bidston Hill, clattering in his car, and entered the drive with the horn music which had heralded former visits, unabashed, unafraid, and rushed to see his friends, a boy despite his years.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Hurrah! Good news, Mrs Norris. Good news, Miss Douglas. Hello! Jacky, Claire,—come here, you little sprites, and say good morning while I take off my coat and shake myself clear of tanglements."

He vanished in the hall, leaving the household staring, incredulous, then returned smiling and fumbling with a packet of cuttings and papers.

"Here you are," he remarked; "I knew how it would be. Read that,—and that, . . . and that. . . . No,—take 'The Chronicle' first, . . . then 'The Academy,' and 'Spec . . . My dear ladies. Pardon me, I believe I haven't explained."

He fixed his eyeglasses and almost immediately dropped it. His face glowed.

"The fact is," he went on more soberly, "Captain Norris's book is out,—'Frayed Seams,' you remember,—and the critics are unanimous in their praise, . . .

unanimous in their decision that here at last is a writer who knows his subject, and is able . . . Pardon,—ten thousand apologies, . . . er . . . the fact is . . .”

What the fact was Colonel Marchmont did not explain. In his delight he had forgotten that Ethel still remembered, and the sight of her blanched cheeks brought him abruptly to halt.

He moved across the room and stood looking out upon the lawn and swaying trees. The sun no longer shone: from somewhere clouds had raced to veil it; the wind swept sighing through the pines at the edge of the hill. The outlook had suddenly grown sad.

For no consideration would he have brought pain into this household, yet here it stood, Helen hurrying the children from the room, Ethel leaning with bowed head across the sofa end, sobbing bitterly.

Marchmont half turned and caught a glimpse of that fair young figure huddled so sorrowfully amidst the pillows. His nerves thrilled. He desired to go to her, to take her in his arms, to press back her gleaming hair and kiss away the tears; to bring a return of the quick, glad look with which she had welcomed him; but, being a man accustomed on occasion to school his impulses, he did none of these things, but faced the window, eating his anguish stoically, as though he saw no reason for words.

A long while he waited thus—searching the trees, watching the slowly moving clouds, and anathematising the lapse of which he had been guilty; then a soft voice called to him—

“Colonel Marchmont.”

He turned round, his face full of trouble.

“Am I forgiven? Dare I venture . . .”

“There is nothing to forgive. You are kindness itself, and I am very silly.”

He came nearer, holding out his hands.

“I would give all I possess to see you happy, Mrs Norris.”

“You have made me happy, . . . believe me, I am very happy,” she told him, smiling through the mists.

"I blundered. It was unforgivable. I ought to be shot for a confounded old meddler. I ought to be . . ."

"And, in that case, . . . poor Arthur's book . . . would never have come out," she faltered.

"It is awfully good of you to take it like that," he stumbled, catching a hint of her distress. "Now, let me go—and . . . a . . . if I may leave these things—some copies of the book, letters, and papers, outside. I will run in some other day and give you any news I may get from the publishers."

Mrs Norris rose and held out her hand.

"How can I thank you?" she whispered, standing flushed, and facing him with softening eyes.

"Don't!" he cried out. "I am not to be trusted. A bungler—faugh!"

He touched her hand softly and left the room with the memory of that glance fixed and indelible in his brain.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### *IPSO JURE.*

Again an interval had elapsed—days, weeks, months indeed—for Colonel Marchmont had no head for the passage of time, and the landmarks left were the only matters worth consideration.

But foremost there stood that amazing indiscretion of his, when for a while it seemed that he had jeopardised the desire which had come to mean life to him; when Ethel, astonished at the genius she had lost, assumed a touch of sadness more poignant, perhaps, with the recurrence of each press-cutting sent her eulogising the book. The days hung heavily on Marchmont's hands. He seemed to have lost ascendancy. It appeared probable that by his own act he had killed the love for which he prayed. Then came a meeting when Ethel had forgotten to men-



tion the book—when she had sung and he had played, regaining mastery. Following this had come a note telling him Callaghan was returning, and that in a month, at the end of the next voyage, Helen and Callaghan were to be married. A month! And now Callaghan was at the Cottage mounting guard.

The hours were crammed with memories for Marchmont. He knew that something had stirred the blood within him and made him see again the pathless tracts he had crossed, the desert he had fought upon, and all the smells and sights of the East—India, Cairo, Suez, Ismailia, and the harbours of the Red Sea, dim, flat, fringed by coral reefs.

At breakfast he sat and courteously acted the host to visitors who knew nothing of the mood that was upon him; persons who babbled incessantly of the joys of Monte Carlo, where, it appears, they had contrived to lose in a few hours a sum sufficient to keep half a dozen families in comfort for a year, and had found the experience exhilarating.

At lunch he listened again, heard the same small talk, and found many things described as "charming" too stupid for words. But with the advent of three o'clock his guests departed and left him to puzzle out alone the cause of his new restlessness.

New now, old once. The "go fever," as Norris and Callaghan dubbed it, the force which had called two of them out to search the East—Marchmont as subaltern of a regiment practising the goose step under Indian suns; Norris as a boy on a merchantman, eager for adventure. The force which once had throbbed incessantly, pushing the pair onward, giving them glimpses of strange lands, lavish colour schemes and the minor chords of barbarian music; but which now for years had been dead for Marchmont, and had given Norris up, dead of its violence.

Yet again it thrilled him as he took an afternoon gallop down the road bordering the Dee. What had revived it? Why was this old impatience come again to harass him? He stretched forward smoothing the mare's sleek neck and caught a glimpse of a pair sitting cooing amidst the gorse at the edge of Thurstaston Common. Love, the king-god,

held them twining arms and oblivious of the panorama stretching at their feet. Love, the king-god, bid them see more beauty in each other's eyes than ever lay in the eye of the sun. It held them in chains, rosily bound: it held them there, people of the counter, anæmic, white and pimply of face, and showed them beauty where others perceived the signals of close air and long confinement. A matter for amazement to all well-ordered minds, but of the same law as that which finds for man beauty in the towzled locks of a Hottentot maid.

Marchmont cantered past, staring at the gleaming line of sea falling in to the mountains and leaving the Point of Air blue against the silver it so lavishly spread. Here were the red old rocks of Thurstaston: Thor's Stone lying flat for sacrifice amidst the gorse and shimmering in the sunshine. Men had worshipped here. Deeds had been sung. Warriors acclaimed; women won: now the old stone lay carved and dotted by the knives of idiots seeking to perpetuate a fleeting moment spent in the lap of the gods; a perching-place for couples worshipping at no particular shrine; people who saw beauty in the shrunken effigies of mankind, stunted and turned out to browse weekly by the benefactors who sweated them. Here, too, was the Dee, the slow half-strangled river of his home-stand, meandering solemnly at the foot of mountains frowning and cloud-capped. And the voice of it rilled up to Marchmont sitting there astride his mare—the voice of the sea, the scream of gulls, the moan of a surf restless and energetically rolling to blot out the sands which barred it.

It bore in it a hint of that music he loved, minor cadences, throbbing, wild; breathing the air of savagery, of conquest—glimpses he had seen. It pointed to him in his loneliness, mouthing at him, showing the vacuity of his life. It bid him mark the effect of waiting, the tense strain of waiting that comes so harshly to men on whom the hand of time has fallen; and he turned about abruptly crying to his mare for speed and galloped homeward.

Ten minutes later a modern horse heralded by horn-like mutterings carried swiftly a message from the slopes of Thurstaston to the slopes of Bidston—"Come out, come

out," it said; "fill the car and bring some music. I am

Lonely!

It was the cry of the man sitting now under Thurstaston gorse, whispering happiness into the ear of the maid he held. It was the cry of the birds swerving and coquetting in mid-air; the cry of a people sweltering in the slums of a city and throbbing with pride that their names lay on the rock of old Thor, and, such is the power of thought on minds accustomed to analysis, it presently dawned upon Colonel Marchmont that the object of his gallop, the visions he had seen by the sea, the memories which had crowded upon him, were all efforts directing him to indite that message.

And such is the power of mind upon mind that, it presently appeared that Ethel had known of his desire, in some spiritual and inexplicably womanish fashion, and had kept Helen and Callaghan lest the message should come in the flesh.

They arrived, therefore, a whole regiment from the Cottage, Jacky and Claire triumphant beside the chauffeur, Helen, Callaghan, and Ethel behind, and broke up the silence at the Manor as only a houseful can.

Tea concluded, Jacky and Claire were despatched with a maid to see the gardens and get themselves lost, while Ethel and Marchmont fell back on the talk they knew—Chopin, Brahm, Tschaikowsky, Grieg. They sang and played till evening came, then in the dying light, red over the purple mountains, yellow all down the glinting gorse and sands of Dee, Ethel sang on from memory—memories haunting her, memories growing up beside her, and Marchmont walked the room, fiddle on shoulder, eyes dreaming, face on fire, accompanying the songs.

Neither paused at the end—Ethel's hand fell away into a new key, Marchmont following her, and again came a favourite—"The Angel at the Window"—thrilling at the ascending chromatic, and falling into a crash of ecstasy as the girl declaimed—

"On the Angel's wings I placed her  
And watched—and watched till they both were gone."

The weird tremolo of the violin died away here, vanishing to a point where sound seemed but the echo of a passing sigh.

And outside, somewhere amidst the shrubs and failing beauties of the Colonel's old-world garden, Helen and Callaghan wandered, discussing the problem as it had been discussed by their mothers; blind to the pitfalls, blind to the dull, strange gaps in the path, dull to the prosaic announcements in papers daily echoing a warning, listening only to the voice of love, the cry which has echoed down the ages always in the same high key of promise, always with the same prophetic knowledge of victory—Trust, trust. Give me thy hand and we will face the world. Give me thy soul and we will ride the whirlwinds. Give me thy lips and we will ascend to the courts of Heaven. Old, old—appallingly old, appallingly travestied, snubbed, and derided; but the music which rings always in the voice of a lover. And Callaghan, the man of rather stern bearing and quick decisions, played upon it in the eye of a dying day.

Crimson lay the river at their feet, criss-crossed with bars of sand, purple and silent. Crimson the sky over common and gorseland, subtly crimson where it faded into night. The firs at the edge of the hill stood out grim and forbidding upon it, thin delicate tracery of spines blurred and massed against the brightness. Far over in the East, Jupiter threw out pale rays searching for the earth he knew; down there, low in the South, a dim sickle appeared flushed above the glooming mountains—and over all, and above all, rolled that wondrous thread of music, the harmony of two souls in accord, the song and the violin mingled, amazingly fertile in response. A look, a touch, as one might say, of the eyes, and major was changed to minor, and thrills crept weeping about the quiet old house, the violin tremulous with sorrow, echoing with tears.

It was the music of the ages, the wild, fierce music of the barbaric East, crashing now and discordant, but blended and marvellous to hear. A while Marchmont aped the Burmese lutist, twanging on a string that seemed to find a brassy discord in its vibrations; now he fell into the

jumbled maze of sound produced by the fiddles and bassoons of a Magyar band. Wild harmonies here; rich dialect, rich apostrophe, and the violin triumphantly ordering the procession of massed chords struck on the piano.

A crash, staccato, virile, full of fight, and again, while Ethel's fingers ran moaningly as though in pain, the shrill notes fell away and the whirl of Malay strings moved twanging amidst the tomtoms in a march that might have arrived from Hades, that might have been heard of Dante or Milton in those moments which they conjure for us of the depths.

The music of the ages. The music of soul appealing to soul. The music before which forces fail, order falls away and love stands predominant. The subtle, alluring, and passionate cry of man calling in the wilderness to his mate. The violin triumphant, the piano following restlessly with the under chords.

And suddenly it ceased.

The violin lay on a cushion, and Marchmont moved across the half-dark room. His hands were pressed to his brow, his head lifted, his pose the pose of a suppliant, but a suppliant in whom there is force and energy and desire. He crossed the room and stood beside Ethel, staring into her eyes like one lost, crying out—

"You make me play; My God! you give me life. You give it and you take it away."

She lifted her eyes in a strange ecstasy, and he sat bunched in a small chair near her, face bent, eyes searching the shadows, hands twisting restlessly at his moustache.

"When I am with you I am in Heaven. When you play for me I go mad—mad with joy—mad with the desire to do. . . . When you sing to me, it seems as though an angel had come down and touched my heart.

"No—don't stir—don't fear—don't turn from me. You know I love you. I need not say it because it stands out—it is my life. I loved you when first I saw you halting there on the *Sentinel's* deck, cold and white in the glare of lamps.

"I envied the eyes that saw you—I hated the fact that they were there. I loved you then, when I did not know

who you were or where you came from, and I have loved you always since."

He rose and walked about before her, pushing out his arms, ruffling his hair.

"There; I have said it. I have worried you with the personal note when all our sensations are thrilling to music; I have intruded the ego we all feel so damnable in others." He moved faster about the room, walking with quick strides, but always keeping close beside her and the piano keyboard.

"I have acted the brute, spoiled an illusion, and deserve to be shot. Mrs Norris, do you understand me? I say I deserve to be shot."

She had no words for this mood—she watched him with eyes that lured.

He walked more swiftly, pushed his long fingers through his hair, and halted suddenly as a voice fell on his ears—a cool, self-possessed, unagitated voice that said—

"Do you know, Colonel Marchmont, that there may be two opinions on that point, and that I . . . ?"

"No, no," he cried out. "Impossible. You couldn't pretend that I have acted in any way but brutishly, caddishly, . . . thrusting myself and my confounded—I beg your pardon—my con—demnable opinions on you when we were busy with memories, ideas, and all the hotch-potch of composition.

"Mutual composition, mind. An infinitely more difficult thing than simple improvisation. The two brains must work in harmony here. The idea must be transmittable, the mind in accord, the brain ready, or we should have crash—bang—rub—thud—and a jumble of sounds as unmeaning as a Jew's harp."

Ethel glanced up at him as he paused a moment beside her. She did not speak. She made no movement, yet he knew that she had looked at him in the dim light and that her eyes were half-closed, mesmeric in their appeal. Again he sank into the chair close to her, so close that by putting out a hand he could touch her, and the fragrance that she carried with her filled his nostrils  
delight.

"Why am I talking like this," he questioned, again grave, his voice ringing, "when every instinct bids me fight and beg for your love? Why am I wasting the time—why?—when all I can say on the subject should have been said long ago? I love you. Ethel, for God's sake don't send me to the right-about. I love you, and I have waited till I can wait no longer—waited till I am sick, hungry for your love in return. Can you give it? Dare I put it to you yet? Can you give up the Cottage and its memories and come to me and music? Tell me if I may hope. Tell me if I have spoken too soon, and put me out of my misery; for as God sees me I am miserable now and in fear. Ethel . . ."

He rose and paced the floor beside her, thrusting out his hands, drawing them back, quick to gather the effect of the chord he had touched. Then Ethel's voice came out to him—

"Colonel Marchmont, . . ." she commenced and halted, feeling her way.

He glanced over at her, pushing the name from him. "There is no colonel here—Albert Clayton Marchmont. Those are the names with which I am weighted. Some call me Barney; but you . . ."

"No," she whispered, "it does not express you. You are the king, . . . my king . . ."

She stood up with a sigh of delight, holding out her hands to meet his and echoing the name she had found him.

He came to her and took her in his arms, looking hungrily into the fair young face so nearly level with his own, and fell to smoothing the lustrous hair from her temples.

"Your king, then—yours, yours, always yours," he whispered, "as you are mine, my queen. I have waited, and now you are mine—mine!" He broke away in a semi-ecstasy and cried out, "Mine at last! . . . Oh, for the years that the locust hath eaten! Sweet, look at me—tell me I am not old."

"Old!" she laughed. "You are a boy. It is I who am old and . . . and . . ."

"And what?"

She hid her face on his shoulder, a slight shiver ran through her frame, and he held her to him, praying for an answer. "And what, Ethel *mia*?"

She reached up and touched him on the cheek.

"Nothing, dear. . . . Only I . . . I love you."

• CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PARABLE AT THE CLUB.

•  
In the smoke-room of the Artists' Club stood and sat a group of men.

The chill winds of an early winter whistled in the streets outside, and already the garb of people passing the windows was changed from lattice-work and flannels to fur and tweeds; only the Arabs touting matches and papers seemed content to shiver in rags.

A tall fair-haired man stood with his back to the fire, throwing a word now and again into the conversation, and retiring after each activity to the solace of his pipe—a black briar excessively polished. Across his forehead was the mark of a scar.

The talk was desultory—horses, dogs, special brands of wine, the latest thing in sac coats—until presently it touched on M'Gee and the magnificence of his wardrobe. • •

One man remarked that the last time he saw him he was in his new motor coat—a thing of sables worth at least a thousand guineas. He said that he looked like a Russian prince, but lacked the air.

"Probably the reason they knighted him the other day," said the man with the scar.

"I don't agree there," a third chimed in; "the fellow has his uses. Remember how he worked for the party during the war. His boats did the bulk of the carrying.



Government can't afford to snub that sort just because he happens to be a bounder."

"A knighthood is the least they could do for him anyhow," said he of the scar.

"They say he expected a baronetcy, and only accepted the other thing as a stepping-stone," the first speaker remarked tentatively.

"A promise the present Government will forget to redeem," another snipped out.

"I don't suppose they will live to administer a second snub," said the scarred man from his place by the fire.

"Oh — how's that, Sedgewick — anything fresh in the air?"

"Nothing—why?"

"Oh, you men in journalism are generally in the know. I thought probably there was something."

"And if there were, and I happened to know it, O mountain of intellect, am I likely to exploit it in the club's smoke-room?"

"Never know what you may do, 'pon honour," the man asserted, joining in the laugh.

"No—and never will; but I should like to prophesy what M'Gee will do," Sedgewick went on, his face cold, impassive; his eyes bright with a concentrated feeling that was very noticeable,—“also, what M'Gee will suffer, for it is a worn subject, and not available just now for 'stock.'”

A laugh rang out, and the man resumed,—

"M'Gee will climb high, but he will not reach anything beyond millionairessdom, and before he dies he will have one more kick for that baronetcy. He will build a hospital to doctor the men he has maimed at his works, or he will set up an orphanage for the children of his drowned sailor-men, and Liverpool will be amazed at this fresh burst of munificence. . . . Want to hear any more?"

"Go on—go on," they replied chuckling, and nudging each other; "go on."

"It's dry work prophesying to unbelievers—fill my glass. Whisky and seltzer."

One of the men touched the bell and gave the order. Sedgewick resumed—

"In a little while M'Gee will die, and Liverpool will vote a site for his marble in Expiation Square—know where that is? No! Lime Street, round about St George's Hall—and Royalty will open it. Then some more knighthoods will be shovelled out, and authority will clap its hands and smoke fat cigars, for which, incidentally, you will help to pay. But M'Gee will be dead."

"Lucky Chancellor!" said a cynic. "Funds are low—he'll want it."

Sedgewick took no heed. He proceeded with the air of a seer translating an Eastern fable.

"Again Liverpool will be beside itself, and, as an offset, I shall earn dollars writing a eulogy of the great man to order of 'The Hustler.' Then Liverpool will build him a statue, and place it with sorrowful eyes in front of his gift to the city."

Sedgewick paused, took a pull at his whisky, and stood in silence while a member came in and looked around. The man retired to a seat by the window, touched the bell, and opened his paper. Then Sedgewick went on banteringly—

"So you see, M'Gee having got himself decently buried, will arrive at the gates of heaven on a day when St Peter will be rather busy."

The new-comer looked up, fixed his glass, and stared over the edge of his paper.

"There will be a number of Shapes about. Seen Sime's drawings? Yes? Well, that sort,—wormy things all more or less contorted. Most of them will be wet. Some of them will have seaweed in their hair, others will still carry the marks of scurvy; and there will be a crowd, thousands deep, of Shapes torn at the docks and patched in M'Gee's benefactory institute."

The man dropped his eyeglass, and went on reading.

"And when he has finished marshalling these Shapes," Sedgewick resumed, selecting his words with care, "he will turn to M'Gee and say, 'Name, please,'—not because he doesn't know his name, mind, but because it's the ritual.

"And M'Gee will say, 'Sir William Johnson M'Gee, please your worship.'

"And St Peter will say, 'What! M'Gee the ship-owner?'

"And M'Gee will say, 'Yes, your worship,' and pat his chest and try to look big—a thing, you remember, he could never do in life.

"Then St Peter will look sad, and will shuffle across to his big book and run his finger down the list of Shapes he has marshalled, and he will say, 'Well, and what can I do for you, Sir William Johnson M'Gee?'

"And M'Gee will say, 'Pass, please,' just as though he were at the Town Hall, and he expected it.

"Then St Peter will look over the top of his spectacles and beckon to the Shapes; and the Shapes will move before M'Gee, every one of them gibing and contortioning at him, exhibiting their wounds and their patchwork; and at the end of the procession St Peter will say—

"'Um—how came you by that wooden leg?'

"And the Shape will say, 'Fell off a tops'l-yard, yer worship. Rotten gear. Becket broke.'

"'I see. Applicant do anything for you?'

"'No, yer worship.'

"'Pass on.'

"Then another Shape will arrive, and St Peter will say to him, 'Um! why do you carry all that seaweed about you?'

"And the Shape will say, 'Drowned, yer honour. It's the badge we wear who're drowned. Lost in the Atlantic. Cut down by one of 'is liners goin' full speed in a fog.'

"'Ah! Do anything for your wife?'

"'Nothin'.'

"'Pass on.'

"Then will appear a Shape of queer externals pushing a barrow, and St Peter will say—

"'Ha! what have we here?'

"And the Shape who wheels will say—

"'Wot's left of my chum, yer 'ighness—a scrap-eaplike of wot was once a greaser.'

"'A greaser, eh? What's that, my man?'

"A chap as pours oil on the cranks and bearin's, yer 'ighness. This one slipped. Guard down. Fell into the crank-pit—10,000 horse-power thumpin' out the revolutions. No, . . . there weren't much left of 'im . . . bigger than a button."

"I see . . . Um! . . . Do anything for his wife?"

"Ad no wife, yer 'ighness."

"Or for his mother?"

"Nuffin', yer 'ighness."

"Ha! pass on."

"Then other Shapes will appear,—the blind from furnaces, the lung-choked from factories, the mangled from the docks,—and each and all will tell St Peter how he got his hurt; and St Peter at length will turn on M'Gee, and will say to him sternly—

"No; there will be no pass for you. This is a very bad case. It must stand over a thousand years for judgment. Come back at the end of that time, and bring any witnesses you may be able to find who will speak in your favour."

The man sitting near the window rose and moved across to the group near the fire, and stood with them listening.

"Then other Shapes—grim things with popping eyes, ghoulish garments, and prong-like fingers—will surround M'Gee and prod him towards a chasm opening at his feet, and—well, M'Gee will go down there to wait."

Sedgewick paused and looked round from his vantage-place by the fire. His eye rested on the new-comer—a cold, unimpassioned gaze. The other men, as much taken aback at his presence in their midst as by the strange address, shuffled with their glasses, and one strove to laugh it off.

"A thousand years!" he said. "Come, that's rather rough on M'Gee; . . . er . . . happen to know him, by the way?"

"Never saw him in my life, to my knowledge."

The new-comer drew a trifle nearer.

"Then why do you lampoon him?" he questioned brusquely. "My name is Marchmont—Colonel Marchmont—and very much at your service."

Sedgewick turned and took his glass from a table beside him and stood with it raised to his lips.

"Lampoon him? Pardon, sir—I happen to have seen some of his wrecks."

"Wrecks, what sort?" came irascibly from the Colonel's lips.

"Both sorts. Human and mechanical—men and ships, to put it plainly, sir; may I inquire why you ask?"

"Certainly. Sir William M'Gee happens to be my brother-in-law, and for the sake of my sister I shouldn't like to think . . ."

"I beg your pardon."

"I think it is due."

"I agree. I would not willingly hurt any one. If I had known that you stood in the room I should have paused. It was bad form to continue in any case—but having said it—I wish it were possible to withdraw. That I am unable to do. Sir William and his methods are too well known; but I apologise to you, sir, and I trust you will forget the blather of a man more accustomed to write than to see visions."

As he spoke Marchmont watched him closely. A steely expression sat in the cold grey-blue eyes, the lines of his mouth neither hardened nor relaxed; the fact that he had been caught, as it were, red-handed, showed not at all. He was simply and plainly unperturbed. He finished his whisky and seltzer, found a dim overcoat, and left with a bow to the company. As he passed out Marchmont turned to the other men, standing somewhat nonplussed at this encounter, and said—

"Who is he?"

"Harold Sedgewick. Rather new here. Good sort though, and no end of a pot at journalism and things."

"Has his knife in M'Gee, anyhow," Marchmont fumed.

"Not more than into other plutocrats, I take it. M'Gee is only a type in his eyes."

Marchmont stood a moment in thought. Twice he put up his eyeglass, and twice it clicked on the buttons of his waistcoat. He refastened his coat, took his liqueur, and said musingly—

"I seem to know the fellow. Sedgewick, did you say—sure?"

"Certain."

"What paper is he on?"

"Several, I gather—but here 'The Hustler.'"

"Um! I must see Broadwood. Know anything about him?—where he comes from and that kind of thing?"

"Know nothing but that he is 'The Hustler's' right-hand man, and that it is touch and go just now whether he doesn't join the staff of one of the big London dailies."

Marchmont passed from Clubland to find his friend in Newspaperland. But at five o'clock he had gathered very few particulars, and had arranged a meeting for the next day. Broadwood knew even less than the men at the Artists', or perhaps it was that Broadwood had no intention of adding to the already rather full details passing for knowledge of Sedgewick at the club.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### MARCHMONT SEES VISIONS.

A wintry day was drawing to its close when Marchmont drove down the long bridge from Liverpool and came to the stage.

The river faced him running seaward, sombre with purple shadows. The vessels were already hanging out their riding-lamps, and long flecks of light lay amidst the purple, quiveringly hinting at the moving water. Behind him as he came down the stage to the riverside station were the ferry-boats fussily ploughing to and fro Wood side; on his right, the jar and clang of the streets and docks; on his left, the Mersey with its burden of wealth bringing shipping, the warehouses and docks of Birkenhead, purple and dotted with yellow squares of light which

threw out long fingers upon the river's face and sent them dancing to the edge of the stage.

Fussily the tugs panted hitherward, thitherward; placidly the hungry lighters drove down from the smoke and grime of higher reaches; proudly conscious of their might, and slowly, crept the tall liners, hitherward, thitherward, shuffling the pack of nations.

Marchmont stood a while gazing at the scene, familiar enough in his eyes, but unknown from the point of view of that man who had drifted across his path and expounded red anarchy with a voice that scorched and whose eyes remained steady, expressionless, under the lash of comment. It was a new light. The whole pivot of humanity was turned for Colonel Marchmont. The acquisition of wealth, according to this man, carried with it heavy responsibilities, and if they were neglected there appeared hobgoblin retribution—St Peter bandying the Shapes, handing out passes and orders for a thousand years with equal *sangfroid*.

And the man believed it. The thing was no figure of speech culled from an excitable brain, but the ordered opinion of a thinker who had, moreover, the gift of carrying men with him whether they recognised it or not. Marchmont did not understand this man, nor did he understand the force he wielded. There was, in truth, something about him that repelled; there was something about him, too, that beckoned, drew men to him, and compelled them to take second place. In this case, Marchmont—an individual who, with a turn of his pen, could have bought up the speaker, lock, stock, and barrel, and remained ignorant of the fact that a cheque had been drawn.

Broadwood, whom he had seen, hammered in views which coincided pretty evenly with those of the men at the club. Sedgewick spoke in metaphor. He lashed a type, and by accident only had it happened that M'Gee's name was avowed. Marchmont had no very high opinion of M'Gee and his ideals. He had before this openly represented some of his methods—still, M'Gee was his sister's husband, and it behoves a man always to stand up for the

dignity of his family, even when their acquisitive methods are impugned.

These facts Marchmont recognised. But there was more, much more he could only adumbrate. He was puzzled by the attitude of the man, by the shape of his head, by his pose, his height—by everything that marks an individual out from his fellows and points to his identity as the man one knows or the man one does not know. The whole thing was puzzling. For once the Colonel found himself unable to form an opinion, and it was to obtain a new one that he had come down to see Callaghan on his arrival at the stage from New York.

The *Sentinel* leaned beside the long pontoon, her funnels white with crusted salt, her decks still wet from the wintry highway she had traversed, her sides humming with the imprisoned energy with which she had conquered. A thin wreath of steam melted from her escapes, a score of small jets dimmed her gaunt sides; as though oppressed by the heat of her race she sweated, mouth open to breathe. She seemed to point a finger of scorn at her grim adversary booming outside, to laugh at the ease of her victory—to laugh as Nelson's *Victory* laughed at the edge of Trafalgar, her guns wreathed in smoke.

Meanwhile the *Sentinel* leaned at the stage disgorging herself of personages wealthy enough and of sufficient leisure to spend the winter months in Southern Europe, and outside the police barrier stood the passive mob, drinking from a distance the delights of globe-trotting and swollen money-bags. They cast admiring glances and violent criticism with all the fervour of a limited and bloodthirsty vocabulary. They felt neither envy nor hate, yet was their phraseology redolent of both. They stood in shawls and mufflers waiting till the great ones had vanished, and eager to welcome those members of the crew who worked for them and were, so to say, lodgers in the homes they provided.

Marchmont forced a passage, and, ascending the gang way, made for the saloon-deck. Here Callaghan met him a few hurried commonplaces passed, and the Colonel was left to wander at will. The ship was late. The crew



were busy expediting disembarkation, and the commander engaged.

An hour or so later the *Sentinel* reposed in dock, safe again from two hazardous journeys, and Callaghan was free to sit and talk with his friend.

The trip was passed under review in a few sentences. "A heavy gale from New York to the Old Head" expressed the major portion of it, "Fog in Channel" the lesser. "Lived in the chart-room and saw no one," Callaghan gave as his share of social blandishments; "and to-night I shall get a good sleep—heigho! Thank God for all His mercies. But that," he announced gravely, "is shop, and I am hungry for news. How's the Cottage?"

The Cottage, it appeared, was well, and the occupants thriving. Marchmont gave the result of his "watch-on-deck," as Callaghan termed it, and decided that he was uncertain which of the two women was the "greater brick"—Helen or Ethel.

"They are both of the kind to tie knots in a man's heart-strings," he decided, "and to hold him chained; but you know that as well as I do, and it is not in reference to it that I have come down pestering you while you are busy.

"The fact is," he explained as Callaghan threw off the suggestion, "I am a trifle worried. Can't say precisely why. Don't know that I have any definite reason; but I want your opinion.

"You know that Ethel and I had agreed to wait still longer yet; but the other day, since you have been gone, old chap, we decided to be married quietly at the same time that you are, and, if it is agreeable to you, to meet you on that Nile trip you are proposing. You see, I am getting old, and I can't afford to play the fool with time. So we decided, . . . and what do you say?"

Callaghan rose from his chair and clasped the outstretched hand—"Gad," he said, "it is the sensiblest thing I have heard for months. Say! Great Scot! what can I say but that we shall be delighted, and, if I could be envious at such a time, envious to the verge of idiocy, Good—well, and what is the drawback?"

That there was something behind, Callaghan read very

plainly, for Colonel Marchmont had not the gift of passivity.

"That is just why I am here," he blurted in answer; "the precise reason I came down to see you. Fact is," he rolled out swiftly, "I had a nasty shock the other day. A devilish nasty shock, and I haven't quite got over it. I met a man at the Artists'—good sort, clever—a journalist and all that kind of thing, you know, on the staff of 'The Hustler,' and the talk fell on M'Gee and his confounded knighthood.

"This man—Harold Sedgewick, by the way—is a radical, in the sense that he sees things aren't quite straight and well ordered, in this marvellous world of ours, and I want you to meet him. I want you to tell me what you think of him; to tell me whether he knows his subject—shipping; and to tell me whether—burr! whether he reminds you of any one. Will you do it? 'Pon my word, I shall be everlastingly obliged if you will—eh, what?"

"Of course I will. Why not?" Callaghan questioned, but grave at the gleam he found in the Colonel's eyes.

"I'll tell you all I know with pleasure; but whether he reminds me of any one, . . . eh, what does that mean?"

"It means precisely what it says, my friend—nothing more, nothing less," came the reply a trifle stiffly, a trifle irritably, as Marchmont rose and paced the room swinging his eyeglass.

Callaghan made no remark. He crossed over, and finding whisky and soda, poured out two portions, split the mineral, and handed one to Marchmont.

"When in doubt," he said, "spin a coin. When bothered, try a discreet mixture."

The colonel looked up with a smile.

"Gad! Yes," he said. "I believe you are right. Confound the man. We won't talk about him."

Callaghan decided that his friend had not the gift of self-control—his eyes gave him away. He crossed to a bureau, and opening the top exposed a handsome silver bowl elaborately engraved with his name and the roll-call of subscribers.

"From my grateful and admiring passengers," he said

with a laugh, "as a slight token of their recognition of my admirable seamanship. A good bit of silver. Old, too. Rather different from the general run of presentations."

Marchmont paused in his walk and took it up. "Queen Anne," he decided. "What will you do with it?"

"Give it to Helen."

"Lucky girl."

"Lucky man, you mean."

"Don't know what I mean, . . . er . . . by the way—speaking of that fellow Sedgewick, you know. When can you give me an evening—to-morrow, or the next day? We can dine at the club and do something after; want to get it over—eh, what do you think?"

"Can't do it to-morrow, as I am engaged; but the day after."

"Very well, Friday—an unlucky day if one were superstitious; and meanwhile, will you be going up to the club at all?"

"Possibly."

"Then look out for him. He is generally in for an hour before dinner—a tall man with a beard. Hard face, scarred, queer eyes, strong voice, and a command of language. If you see him let me know. Send me a wire, eh? Oh—and yes—now I will run away or that man of mine will think I am drowned. Coming up town by any chance?"

"No—not yet. Presently, and then I am running over to the Cottage."

Marchmont finished his whisky, and, looking Callaghan in the face, said twice—"Lucky man, lucky man," and passed down to the gangway. Here he paused a moment, and grasping his friend's hand, said—

"I told you I was worried, eh? Very well, I didn't exaggerate. Let me know if you want to see me before Friday."

He descended without further words, and tramped noisily up the stage.

Callaghan returned to the saloon-deck, and stood a while looking down at the hatches where men like ants were already at work delving amidst the cargo, and

Marchmont's words beat out again, thumping to the rotation of piston arms revolving there at the end of the winches. "A journalist. A man of parts. Tall, with fair hair and beard."

The stars looked down from a frosty sky winking solemnly over the fussing ants burrowing in the bowels of the hold. Steam hung about them like a fog. They passed up and about the ladders carrying packages as the ants carry larva, and appeared similarly intent on arrival.

The winches rolled out a drum-like accompaniment to their march.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

HAROLD SEDGEWICK.

A man who has made a name for himself in either of the world's artistries speedily arrives at the dignity of a seer; but no calling perhaps lifts him so rapidly to the platform as literature or journalism, and then the true man stands confessed.

He may conceivably be of the type which gets itself known as eccentric: wears long hair, a peculiar brand of collar, coat, or tie, and, posing as the saviour of some special form of art, presently passes into notoriety as a genius. Or he may be of the denunciatory type, which preaches down, by sheer weight of metal, all opinions not his own, and comes in time to be weighed and laughed at by those who know him. Or he may be of the quiet and more-unheard of type, which works conscientiously for work's sake, and goes about avoiding explanations from the rostrum on which mankind has placed him.

Harold Sedgewick belonged to this last category, but there was in him, too, a breath of the denunciator; a suggestion, so said his critics, that at some period of his career he had been hard hit by circumstance, perhaps

even by one of those plutocrats against whom he levelled his anathema.

Yet no one ever heard a sentence in explanation of that former life; and so, in the course of time, it came to be said that it must have been during some previous incarnation of the man, when, as a soldier, or a lawyer, or a doctor, Nemesis in the guise of a plutocrat had got hold of him and wrung him dry.

But there was so much kindness in Sedgewick's diatribes, his written word so generously advocated the cause of the down-trodden, that it was impossible to withhold sympathy from him or from his subject. • Of course his aims were the aims of a dreamer, a philanthropist, who seeing things obviously askew in the pit desires to right them at the expense of the section who batten on conditions as they are; a philanthropist withal, who was poor, who had seen the wastrel shadows, rubbed shoulders with them and emerged smooth to fight their battles. For every man who comes from the pit unscathed a thousand sink irretrievably. For every man who throws off the yoke it has fashioned, ten thousand reel on the verge, sinking, floundering, fighting for the bone we call chance.

There is no chance in the pit, that was Sedgewick's dictum. Mankind is at your throat. The sunken clutch you by the knees. The lurching hold you swaying. The drunken have a hand on your neckcloth twisting it to choke. Mankind in the shape of the capitalist, mankind in the shape of the foreman and ganger, who sees in your starved plight nothing to squeeze. It is all one. The majority sink shouting. But Sedgewick had not sunk, and there lay in his grey-blue eyes a hint of the reason, a visible instance of the survival of the fittest,—a man who had no fear of the Universe with which he had been at grips.

When he spoke his voice rang out so clear and strong, with such intonations and appeals to kindness, that few, despite sometimes their antagonism, were found ready to speak harshly of his criticisms even when it was also  
 vious that they felt the sting.

And so, in course of time, it came to be said that Sedgewick saw more in the ordinary transactions of life than any other writer. That he had divination, perhaps even inspiration. That nothing passed before him but he searched the records for evidence of its method, its being, down to the very genesis from which it was evolved. And from these facts his pictures grew. Bold, strong in light and shade, fascinating in description, and with a touch that captured men as few journalists are able to capture them.

That such a man was a *persona grata* at the Artists' soon became evident. That he stood on a pedestal, self-carved and apparently enduring, was equally noticeable; and that there were some wags amidst the members who would strive to pull his leg and give him a fall goes without saying. But of enemies Sedgewick was free.

And it was thus with him on the night Callaghan first met him.

Callaghan had gone down to the club intent on the description given him by Colonel Marchmont, and there he found his man astride the hearth, smoking a big briar and holding forth with women for his subject. It was his one bitterness, the one point on which he appeared radically unbalanced.

That a semicircle of flaccid clubmen were egging him on to speak more strongly in depreciation of the modern type did not appear to ruffle him. He was intent on the thoughts to which he gave utterance. They absorbed him. His face was in shadow as Callaghan entered, his voice steady and unimpassioned, but there was something in his pose so reminiscent of Norris that at once Callaghan sprang forward with the words, "By Jove! Arthur, old chap, . . . er . . ." and halted amazed.

Sedgewick had turned at the cry and now faced him in the full light, his eyes cold, his gaze so steady and unexpressive of the Norris who had gone that Callaghan could only blurt his apology.<sup>40</sup>

"Pardon," he said, "but you reminded me of—of an old friend. A very dear friend . . . Cha! 'Pon my word, I was startled."

"Your double, Sedgewick," said the cynic of the group. "I've heard of him. He poses."

"One of Sedgewick's incarnations," a bearded smoker laughed, reverting to the joke.

"My friend is dead," Callaghan announced a trifle sternly, still watching the man unmoved and calm astride the hearth.

"And I, sir," Sedgewick smiled back, "am obviously in the flesh. No, I don't think I have had the pleasure."

Some one muttered the usual formula, and Sedgewick extended his hand.

"Captain Callaghan?" he said, searching him with his eyes. "I have wanted to meet you. You know the Western Ocean. I only dream of it, draw pictures of it, and try to make people realise what sailors face in these days of greyhounds and record-breaking passages. I wish I had your knowledge."

Callaghan smiled, and a wistful expression came into his eyes.

"It might spoil your touch, as poor old Norris used to say," he remarked, gravely reminiscent.

"Norris, who was he?"

"My friend, the man of whom you reminded me just now, and who, curiously enough, was a writer also."

Sedgewick stooped over the fire knocking the ashes from his pipe. "We must have a chat about him," he said; "one is always interested in a fellow-craftsman. Where did you meet?" He moved away from the group, and drawing Callaghan with him the two found vacant chairs near the window.

"We were boys together on the *Worcester*," Callaghan returned, leaning back, pipe in full blast. "What will you take?" He touched the bell and a waiter appeared.

Sedgewick promptly gave his order and filled his pipe.

"So Norris was a sailor too," he remarked, striking a match. "Strange what a number of writer-men we find among the fraternity,—have you noticed it?"

The pipe came into full play, and Sedgewick lay back revelling in the clouds as Callaghan replied that the matter had scarcely come before him in that guise.

"Well, it is so," Sedgewick commented. "And I think it is accounted for by the fact that at sea man is confronted with the necessity for thought perhaps more than is the case with persons ashore. He is more alone. He is brought face to face with Nature. The little, petty influences of shore life do not disturb him—women are not there to disturb him. He learns, as all men cast in the world's lone spaces learn, that intelligent thought is better than crisp fripperies; that an hour in solitude with his pipe is productive of more pleasure than a month in the company of the best wife society ever provided." •

Callaghan drew back a trifle. The topic was scarcely congenial, despite the line of demarcation suggested by the inflection in Sedgewick's voice. He said rather coolly, "Afraid I can't follow you there, but you seem to know sailors pretty well,—ever been at sea?"

A strange expression dawned in Sedgewick's face; he looked up through a cloud of smoke, pausing, and evidently weighing his answer. At length he said, in the hard, ringing tones of one who would banish an unpleasant topic—

"I, . . . well, yes,—once. But I don't talk of it. I am not in love with what I saw, or . . . By the way, though," he branched off, speaking rapidly, "I came across a man a while ago who dabbles in shipping; Jewish type, not by nationality, you understand, but by proclivities, and I should like your opinion on his—well, we will call them investments."

Callaghan nodded. "If it is in my line, I will give it with pleasure," he remarked, wondering at the swift change.

"Thanks. Yes, it is a subject on which you are entitled to speak, while I can only guess and stretch out my hands. Here is the case.

"The man trades in Birmingham, and is, as far as I can discover, a wine and spirit merchant. At all events, over his office windows there runs that legend, but I have never seen any business transacted with the bottles. I hear he is a shipper. I don't know,—and, honestly, this side of



him is an enigma to me. But there is another side, and I came in contact with it quite by accident. You see, men know I am a journalist and fond of shipping, so they spin me yarns. Well, this was put into my hands by way of a joke, as I gathered. We will call our trader Harrison, and admit that he is a wine-shipper. Nothing wrong in that, of course; but behind the importing device there seems to be another scheme. Harrison seeks out rotten ships,—vessels that have run their time, vessels that have to be re-classed or sold to the Germans,—rickety vessels, groggy about the knees, ill-found, broken-backed, a type that is to be seen still nuzzling our dock-walls, and making ready to face the Channel gales in spite of the Board of Trade; and he insures them."

Sedgewick stopped short, watching his companion through the smoke. After a moment he withdrew his pipe and said bitingly, "Do you consider that legitimate business?"

Callaghan smiled at the suggestion. "Of course," he said, "it is not a business I should care to dabble in myself; still, if the premiums are paid, I suppose it comes under that head. It is what underwriters term a sporting risk."

"And it has your approval?"

"No, I don't go so far. Still," Callaghan lifted his eyebrows, "one could not condemn on those grounds alone."

"In other words," Sedgewick threw out, "if I know that your house is so old that the next gale will blow it away, I may insure and reap the result of my foresight, providing I don't cut away any of the timbers, eh?"

"I suppose so."

"And you would be prepared to shake me by the hand afterwards?"

"No, I should be inclined to kick you for not warning me."

"Precisely. But supposing that after I have paid the premium for a year or so, the house is only blown down because I have given it a little push—cut away some timbers, we'll say. How then?"

"In that case, of course, you come within reach of the law, and can be dealt with."

"But is it not an incentive to crime? Isn't it playing with fire?"

"If you come to that, all insurance is an incentive to criminality."

"Exactly—but this! Surely this is the wickedest, the most despicable of all the tribe. The man batters on the blood of his kind. He wallows in misery. There is no back door at sea, you know. This man is the modern prototype of the wrecker—at all events in desire. A shipwreck is his means of existence; the drowning of men provides the wherewithal with which he shall find pretty dresses for his wife, frocks for the children, shillings for the plate on Sunday. Good God! to me it is the one thing wholly and irrevocably damnable. I can conceive nothing fouler, nothing more hideous.

"And note the temptation. A man has paid premiums on a coffin for several voyages. He has watched her come in and stagger out again into the teeth of a gale, and he has gone home thinking those strange thoughts which grow in a man's mind with the bafflement of his desire; the thoughts he has persuaded himself are honest, and he has remembered the pounds sterling he has sacrificed in the hope of—of what?"

"A shipwreck, my friend. A disaster, *the* disaster which has not occurred, *the* disaster which, apparently, will not occur, and he tells himself now, as he is plodding homeward, that he cannot continue this sort of thing for ever, especially as the premium on rattletraps is an item to face, and that it must end. He decides that it is unreasonable,—he, this little, big-headed, rascally seller of wines and spirits,—and, well, I put it to you, Callaghan, human nature is very pliant, very elastic. We can bring ourselves to any belief, provided it sufficiently touches our pockets—and there you are. We have all the elements necessary for plotting barratry, all the elements required to seek from the hand of man that aid which the Hand of God will not vouchsafe."

"Do you still think it pardonable?"

Callaghan throughout this appeal had watched his companion closely, noting the masterful grip, the steely eyes, the whole pose of earnestness so apparent to those who came under Sedgewick's power, and now, as the voice ceased with that ringing query, he blew a cloud of smoke and said—

"No, on the contrary, I think it damnable; but I would punish the man, not the insurance companies."

"And I," Sedgewick rejoined, a trifle bitterly, "would alter the laws so that it might not be possible."

"You can never order morality by Act of Parliament," Callaghan insisted.

"No, but you may induce morality by removing the temptation."

Sedgewick rose and stretched himself, standing with his back to the light. He appeared so strong, so full of force, that Callaghan marvelled at the suggestion which had fallen upon him. Norris! No, it was not Norris—and yet—

He rose with something like a sigh, and Sedgewick held out his hand. "I must get away now," he said, "but I hope to see you again before long, and to get you to take me over that ship of yours. She rather holds me. Holds one as the victor in a fight rarely fails to hold. They tell me she ran down a sailing vessel—passed over her would be the more correct term—and I am anxious to see how . . . Will it be possible?"

"To-morrow evening, if you like."

"Very well—after dinner I shall be free."

"You dine with Colonel Marchmont, don't you?" Callaghan suggested.

"Yes—why?"

"Then we shall meet—for I, too, am a guest at the Conservative."

"Oh, that is delightful. It simplifies matters—or will, if the Colonel is as keen on ships as I am."

"In this case I think he is," Callaghan returned. "Good-night."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## TWO VIEWS OF ONE PROBLEM.

*In the Avenue.*

Night had fallen—a soft, dreamy night, with the moon at full and the stars asleep in the silvery sea which flooded them. The lights at the Cottage waned. Only dimly the yellow glow appeared in window and balcony. The moon looked down upon them and they radiated silver, blinking upon the wide, open landscape they faced.

Silvery bushes, silvery trees, silvered swaying boughs, all stripped and rigid against the sky-line; the road to Upton like a silver snake coiled amidst the hedgerows; the valley exhaling a silver mist, through which peeped islands of trees, the roofs of houses, and a distant clump of gorse; the far-off mountains, even to Moel Famma, falling away ridge behind ridge until they melted into the pale silver of the skies. And here, at the edge of the lawn, moving slowly up and down the drive, were Helen and Callaghan, Ethel and Marchmont, arms linked and rather silent.

The two girls were bright enough. Indeed their sunniness was a distinct reproach to the glum and thoughtful attitude of those two lords of theirs who had come to dine and talk. Both girls had noticed the phase and had rallied the men without mercy; but now dinner was over, and they walked, warmly wrapped in furs, waiting for the car which was to carry them through the moonlight.

It ran presently round the bend, drew up with a jar, and stood panting beside the pavement while Ethel and Marchmont ascended: then once more came the entreaty already answered in the drive, "So you won't come, . . . positively and for the last time, won't?" Ethel cried out.

"No—two's company, you know—we will wait for you here."

"Very well. But don't say we wouldn't take you by-and-by."

"Never fear," Helen answered brightly. "We are not envious—are we, Dick?"

"Not a whit."

The car whirled. And from it came Marchmont's laugh as the two re-entered the drive. "As you like, . . . perhaps you are right—*au revoir!*"

Then, as it passed out of sight, Helen turned to Dick and said—

"Now, please tell me why you have robbed me of that glorious spin, and if I don't find the excuse sufficient, I shall . . ." she shook one finger at him warningly, until finding no smile to encourage her she faced him with, "Dick! you are worried; mayn't I share?"

And Dick, linking her by the waist, paused and stood looking down into the clever, upturned face so softly beautiful in the moonlight.

"Tell you?" he said half wistfully, "I wish I could; but the truth is I can scarcely tell myself. The bare suggestion of such a position takes my breath away. It is almost inconceivable, and with those two humming over the roads in their car, happy, loving, full of life, it means tragedy, Helena—cold, reasonless tragedy . . ."

"Those two!" her hands were on his shoulders now. She leaned upon him, lifting her face to search his. "Dick, you have not told me, . . . look, I am waiting, what is it?"

"My dear," he broke out, soothing the soft white forehead as though she were a child, and he stood to comfort her,—“my dear, I cannot tell you. That's the bother of it. There is nothing definite. It is all surmise, guess-work, hazard, and I want your advice. . . . Let us walk, or I shall forget what I must say in the beauty of your eyes. Come, Helena, link up and tramp. That is what we do when we are bothered—tramp.”

They moved down the drive, walking the sandy path, while the trees swayed on either hand above them. Then again Callaghan spoke—

"There is a man in town, I met him at the club, who

is strangely like—link in tight, sweet—like what poor Arthur . . . was when we saw him last. Arthur—your cousin, you remember. Of course it's madness to think of such a thing," he went on, speaking angrily "sheer madness. But—well, I don't know, . . . the man's pose suggested it, the turn of his head, as you call it; everything except the face, the eyes—but it gave me shock. Can't forget it. Nonsense, eh, little girl? sheer undiluted jimjams, eh . . .?"

Helen had linked in tightly, but as the words tumbled out, hot from lips usually so calm and stern, she gripped the arm she held more firmly, swayed a trifle, half paused then fell into step, saying, "Arthur! Why, Dick, how could it be possible when we know . . . we know that he . . .?"

"Oh, as far as that goes," Callaghan broke in, pacing up the drive,—“as far as that goes you see there was no direct evidence—only the watch and things, . . . the size build, and the rest of it. We could not have *identified* him but for these things; and so you see . . . link in tight, Helena, don't let me scare you, or . . .” he halted abruptly and caught her in his arms.

"There we are!" he exclaimed. "I might have known it. What the devil did the fool come blundering to me with his suggestions for—making me bother you with fancies which may be just death to some of us."

"Fool—what fool?" Helen questioned, gravely facing him and smiling faintly.

"Why, Marchmont. No man but a born idiot would have let me read his thoughts—no man but . . ."

"Then, Colonel Marchmont saw the likeness too? came swiftly from the white, set lips.

"Perhaps—who knows, . . . he did not say so, mind, but his actions pointed to it—pointed, Helena. . . . Are you strong again? No tremolos? Right! Link in and tramp! We must thrash this out."

She smiled in his face, this weaker of the sexes—smile while her pulses tingled, the blood ran swiftly, leaving her white, and cold in the furs she wore. Tramp! What not? Surely that was the way to face trouble; to die

cover an avenue down which it would be possible to turn. Tramp! And with Dick at her side, supporting her, holding her to him—where, she questioned, wistfully glancing at him, would she not tramp, given his aid?

They moved down the drive: up it till they faced the house, back again to the gates—then Helen said distinctly, "Dick, it is impossible. Oh! Surely if Arthur were . . . alive . . . he would come home to us and not masquerade as some one else. Tell me," she added, as again a swift thought struck her, "what is he like—what is his name?"

"Name? Harold Sedgewick. Like? Tall; fair beard, scarred forehead, cold eyes, impervious to criticism—hard as nails."

"Then it cannot be Arthur—why, you must remember Arthur's sensitiveness. . . . What does he do?"

"Writes."

"An author?" she cried, a new tinge of alarm mastering her.

"A journalist, sweet,—link in,—and it is not the eyes one thinks of but the pose, the turn of the head, the hang of the arms and feet. In these he is Arthur Norris. In his face and his manner he is just Sedgewick."

"Did you suggest it to him?" she questioned again.

"I did. I was so startled that I called him Norris, and afterwards we talked of Norris, we two in the club."

"And he did not wince?"

"Not a bit. He was extremely interested in all I said, and wishes to see the *Sentinel*. Apparently, too, he knows all about the *Coorong* collision, and revels in the details—from a literary point of view, of course."

"Then it can't be Arthur," Helen decided. "It is impossible."

"I can't go so far as that, Helena," Callaghan rejoined.

"Then let me see him. Bring him out here, Dick—and I . . ."

"Can't—there's Ethel."

"I forgot—very well, somewhere else."

"I doubt if it's possible—he is *Why* of women—hates society, and all the rest of it."

"Then you must arrange a meeting and let me be there," Helen decided. Again, after a brief pause—"O Dick, my poor, poor Dick!"

They walked the sandy path in silence. The moonlight fell upon them, drawing bold shadows which accompanied them as they moved. The house had no attraction for them. They passed up and down, arms linked.

*In the Car.*

Swiftly through the silver night, leaving a whirr and rattle they scarcely heard, Ethel and Marchmont drove from the Cottage gates and presently struck the Storeton road. The broad white road which hies through Bebington, giving peeps of a landscape reaching to the Welsh hills shimmering out there in the moonlight: the road which descends suddenly, smoothly, at the edge of that little hamlet, and enters beneath trees and rolling farm lands the long and winding way to Chester. Who that knows this road does not love it?—who that has swept down the steep on cycle or motor has not revelled in the exhilarating progress, noted the little touches of beauty, the quaint old houses, the peep at the Wirral's Devonshire lying about Dibbinsdale and Raby, and drawn a breath of joy on the great white road it joins at Hooton: the smooth white road running now straight as an arrow's flight to the old Cathedral city lying on the banks of the Dee?

These two knew it well. Marchmont was accustomed to praise it as one of the two great highways of the Wirral, and now he had planned to circumnavigate the peninsula, going to Chester by the new road, returning by the old,—a forty-mile spin,—a trifle to be done in an hour in certain conditions with that marvellous car. No jolting. No offensive rattle,—at all events, for those who sat inside,—only a delicious sense of skimming, the free-wheel, brakeless, down-hill swish of the cycle intensified, and a keen chaffeur who knew every inch of the way and would take no risks.



Storeton, Brimstage, Thornton Hough, Raby, Willaston, Hooton, traversed at speed, almost in silence—almost without thought. They were together; these two who had met in the shock of a collision on the Atlantic; together, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, swaying at the curves, thrilling at the swift descents. They lived one life, drew one breath. It was all new to them; all so new, this old, old thing of the hills, this love which held them bound—this love, at which men sneer, groping in the dark to find it.

Silent! Well; and is not silence sometimes heavenly—is it not possible to see the stars in eyes flashing and downcast by turn? Speechless! Again, is not silence sometimes crammed with words? A man in the forties—a woman well in the twenties, already a wife, already a widow; not a soft bread-and-butter miss, but a woman, beautiful, radiant, strong in the knowledge of what life brings to women—strong yet in love, thrilling at the touch of that shoulder so caressingly near—thrilling, and in silence. Do we not know them?

Down the Chester high road. Past Sutton; staring through the raised glass screen, watching the travellers, the stream of carts and cyclists, motors and horsemen passed and overtaken on this swift, dry, springy highway of the Wirral. Over the slopes of The Dale, under trees that swept the sky,—the cold, silvery sky of winter,—then more slowly, shouting on the horn and heralded by powerful head-lamps, down into the old, wise streets of Chester.

Horn blasts here. Break, rattle, jar. A sudden spurt, and they were at last outside the hotel and entering for refreshment. Three-quarters of an hour had put them in the heart of the city; the same interval would suffice to carry them back—a distance, probably, of twenty miles.

Marchmont noted the fact as they took their seats at a small round table, and Ethel flung back her furs.

“Not bad running,” he assured her; “eh, *cara mia*? An hour is good work at night-time; but with this moon, and this brilliant touch of freshness, even the car does better. Moods—moods—we all have them. And to-night

I feel that it is essential to drive. I would fly if I could—and could take you with me. Fly! God! Flying would be slow if. I knew that at the end you were mine; . . . understand that mood, sweetheart. Is it plain . . . ?”

A portly waiter appeared balancing a tray carrying coffee and liqueurs. He placed them with a flourish on the small round table, handed biscuits, and withdrew to his lair to watch in fat beatitude this couple who leaned near the fire and talked with their eyes, their lips, and by gesture. The man he decided was a “furriner”; he pitied the taste of the lady, wondered at her choice of one wearing so grizzly a moustache, and fingered his own smooth flabbiness with a touch of disdain.

• Marchmont lifted his glass,—

“You will join me, sweetheart?”

“To-night—for love?”

“For love? To love—to the king-god who hides from women our grossness, and makes us appear worthy. Worthy! My God! Ethel, can you guess what thoughts lie in a man’s heart when he faces his beloved? Can you guess anything of his desire? Is it patent—or is it all unknown, all dark, the possibilities unworthy of thought?”

She lifted her eyes to his, a swift, pathetic glance that pierced him to the heart. “I think, perhaps, we guess; but generally the guesses fall short of actuality, and sometimes they fail altogether—need it trouble us?”

She spoke lightly, hoping, perhaps, to stay the mood; but he maintained his attitude, leaning on the elbow of his chair, one hand raised to shade his eyes.

“Trouble? Gad! What am I thinking of? Drink up. Take your sweet poison and let us get out on to the road again. I want to talk, to hold you, to be sure you will not leave me. . . . And I want to kiss those soft lips—to get the honey from them; and here—here . . . why, all the world is agog apparently at the fact that a man and a woman can require a liqueur and coffee after a drive of twenty miles. Come, I am hungry—hungry for solitude and my queen.”

They passed out into the cool night, and Marchmont drew the furs about the girl, tucking her in and making her cosy in the nest-like seat behind the raised screen. He looked out when all was ready, and gave the word—"Home, Maslin, Old Road, and let her go when you can."

The horn broke the silence of the quaint street, the car trembled, and they moved swiftly from the gables and rows of Chester, and entered again on the road—the long straight road that cuts the Wirral from North Gate to Hoylake flats—the smooth, springy road that was to take them to the Manor.

The car ran swiftly now. Cobbles, tram, lines, and crossings were past, and Ethel leaned back amidst the furs, her cheek on Marchmont's shoulder. He put out one hand and drew her to him, circling her with a touch that caressed. "Talk, sweetheart," he begged; "tell me whether you like my new car."

"Like it!" She gave a quick exclamation of delight, "Why, it is heavenly."

"It is yours," he whispered, touching her cheek.

"Mine!" the cry of delight became a cry of surprise, and he caught her in his arms, burying his face in the furs at her neck.

"Yours, Carina; yours, if it does its duty well to-night; yours, to take out when you will—to carry you where you will, . . . to carry you from me when you no longer love. To carry you back to that old home of yours—to leave me desolate at the Manor, . . . to do your bidding only. Ethel!" he drew her to him, his head back searching her face; "Ethel, do you love me?"

"I never loved any one else," she answered smiling.

"Then why were you married?"

"Why do most girls marry?" she countered, swiftly, wondering at his mood.

"Because they love, I suppose."

Ethel sat a moment silent, then a trifle bitterly came the reply—

"Because they want a home. Because marriage is often the only means of avoiding slavery, the drudgery of teaching, the anguish of 'companionship,' and all the

other known 'professions' open to women," she told him. "That is why they marry."

"But you, dear, these things did not touch you. Why did *you* marry?"

The car hummed swiftly on the long straight road beyond Mollington. Almost in silence, the moon silvering them, they passed through the landscape, pulsing, held together by interwoven arms and bound by a sympathy which had long merged into the passion of desire.

A strange question. One striking at the ethical relations of woman and man—man and woman. It fell on ears that scarcely recognised its meaning; on an intelligence that knew precisely how little love had been given to that husband who had passed. Love? Was it not patent? Had not Mrs Grundy remarked on the fact from the security of her tea-table? Had not the whole world of gabblers conspired to point her delinquencies? And now the question came from Marchmont, the man who sat beside her, circling her with his arms. She threw back her head—

"Why did *I* marry?" she reiterated. And with a sudden cry of anguish, "Oh, because I was a child and did not know, . . . because I thought I loved him, and . . . and because I was a fool."

"Then you did not love him?" came instantly from the lips bending over her; "you never loved him?"

She lifted one hand, struggling for freedom. This new torture seemed designed to try her, to test her. It appeared for the moment that he attempted to learn by analogy what would be his position in the future they faced, that he doubted; but a swift look into his eyes gave the lie to the suggestion, and she faced him crying out, "Don't! don't! He was my husband. He is dead, . . . it is awful."

But Marchmont watched her with eyes suddenly relentless, eyes which no longer entreated. "Tell me," he said sternly. "I shall never touch it again, but now I must know. Come."

She looked up, startled at the tone, and answered, "I might have loved him, if . . . if he . . ."

"But you did not?"

"No."

"And if he had come back to claim you?"

She lifted her shoulders, shuddering.

"In that case I suppose I should have continued to suffer."

"And if he came back now—pardon the question. It is essential."

A new light dawned in the girl's eyes. She looked up with a touch of anger, saying, "You know it is impossible."

"I put it hypothetically, suppose."

"And I refuse to answer random questions. Why do you ask them? What do you suspect?"

"Suspect—nothing."

"Then why are you trying me,—is it kind? Have I given you cause?"

"You?" he answered, at bay at the note in her voice; "why, you are my heaven, my queen. Without you I am lost. Can't you see I love you—can't you see?"

She watched his eyes. They did not falter. He continued to stroke her hand, holding it firmly beneath the rug. The car ran rasping down an incline, and when they reached the level he drew her to him, crying out, "What, can't I be jealous even now without making you suspicious? Carina! Look up, tell me what you would do."

She watched him still. Curiosity stood in her gaze—wonderment, incredulity. Then reaching out she placed her arms about his neck and with her cheek against his said very earnestly—

"What should I do if he came back to claim me? What should I do?" She paused a moment, searching the flying landscape; "dear, don't you know that . . . that I should be afraid of the years, . . . that I should not dare to face them, . . . that I should run away, somewhere, . . . run away . . . down the slope, up to Thurstaston, to you . . . and," she buried her face, her breast heaving, a quick sobbing cry in her voice, "and get you to . . . to—Oh! I should come to you and let them say what they would."

The last sentence fell swiftly as she faced the light once more. "I should come to you and let them say what they would." It sounded like a challenge.

Still Marchmont made no signal. He watched her as he watched him. He said softly, "And suppose I refused to take you in?"

She drew back. "Suppose . . . suppose!" she cried; there was more than a touch of scorn in her voice now. "Suppose—oh, well, is there not always the river for riven humanity?"

The man's face relaxed. He caught her in his arms, holding her close. "You love me like that?" he whispered. "My God! I don't deserve it. Ethel . . .!"

"That is true," she broke in swiftly. "Few men deserve the love a woman can give. It is not kind to try me so, . . . and for no reason. I thought . . ."

"Hush! Hush! Don't say it. I know I transgressed. I know I overstepped the line, but I love you. I am jealous of you. I want you for myself. I want you at the Manor, to see you at the foot of my table, to be with you always, . . . and," he broke off abruptly, but after a moment's hesitation, cried out, "Carina! you will think me mad to-night. Well, I am. I am mad to hold you in my arms and know that nothing can come between us again. I am mad enough to ask you to hasten our wedding, to let it take place at once, next week at the latest. Come, what do you say?"

She looked him steadily in the face, saying, "Is there no other reason?"

"None; I want you."

"And I, dear, want you."

Silence fell on the words. It seemed that there was nothing else to say. The sentence held finality. They leaned back among the furs watching each other's eyes.

The car rolled swiftly past the old, timbered, half-way house of the Wirral, and turning a bend, went sweeping into Heswell—up hill, down hill, across a bridge, clattering through the village street, then up, up, labouring like a heavily laden engine to the highlands where the Dee broke in upon them dappled in the moonlight—soft, blue,

outlined with patches of gorse. The two sitting there in the car saw nothing, felt only the throbbing of pulses which ran riot under a calm exterior.

And here they entered the beginning of that long smooth descent, the place where cyclists cease pedalling and go swiftly gliding the three miles that takes them to Thurstaston, nestling amidst the trees and gorse.

Three miles at railway speed. The keen air broken by that raised screen. Three miles hand in hand, oblivious of passing waggoners with teams hitched securely against fright. Past the old, steep, wooded slopes; down the winding, snake-like road, so white and smooth for their passage; past the Hall, standing at the edge of the common, round to the right, up and round it, skirting the woods, brushing the gorse tangle till the Manor stood lighted before them, and the chauffeur went slowly to the gates, stiff and beating his hands.

Then in the half light, trees bending over them, Marchmont urged once more in a voice that shook, "Then need we wait?"

And there came to him that answer for which he prayed, softly, half-timorously, "No, if you want me—why should we?"

"Next week, then—Tuesday—Wednesday . . .?"

"Tuesday."

"And what about Helen and Callaghan? They were to have . . ."

"Does it matter?"

"Nothing matters."

The car moved on—under swaying trees, stripped and white in the moonlight, past the lawns and conservatories, up to the old square porch.

"Yours, Carina. All yours," Marchmont whispered.

And Ethel, standing in the half-dark porch, lifted her face to his with lips that smiled.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF.

Snow on the hills, snow on the roofs, mud and slush lying thick and yellow in those streets where Dame Nature is left to do the scavenging, snow and mud in the roads leading to the country shimmering in the moon-glare beyond. Friday—a day of ill-omen to those of us who find in time the material wherewith to predicate misfortune.

It was nine o'clock, and as the hour clanged out from the city's clocks a quartermaster climbed to the *Sentinel's* bridge, struck two bells, and passing down the ladder resumed his promenade. It was cold. The wind swept up from the sea, carrying with it another fragment of our English winter for people to examine.

The giant ship lay solemn and immense at her berth in the Canada Dock: her pole masts, pointed with snow on the windward side, pierced the dark, still sky; a wreath of steam melted into the air high up beside her monstrous funnels, white as the distant roofs and hills. From far down in the engine-room came the tap of hammers, sometimes a shout, ringing cavernous to the dome. Aft, on the starboard side, a gang of men passed up and down a long sloped plankway carrying cases in the glare of a group of arc lamps; but elsewhere was silence—the silence of a ship whose heart still beats, whose pulses throb, and through whose veins gushes the steam that is her life blood, with a dull, rolling, menacing sound indicative of the power latent there and waiting.

On every hand were ships, the leviathans of modern days, loading and unloading, coaling and lying at pause. Their spars stood out against the clear frostiness, the white-roofed sheds, the staring white buildings where men still worked, rolling trucks into barn-like interiors. In the dock were barges, lighters, tugs, and all the medley of "small fry" that come to tend the big ship's wants, to



ed her with coal, water, stores, cargo; but these for the most part lay at rest, idly shadowing the water, outlined in white, and placid beneath the cold, dead moon.

And all around on every hand were the high Swan mounds, standing on their pedestals like planets in a rambling orrery.

At the head of the *Sentinel's* gangway marched a quartermaster. On the dock-sill beneath him were grouped a knot of seamen, standing stolidly to appraise the giant which fed them. They made no fresh remark, they failed altogether to discover anything noteworthy in her appearance. She was newly painted, her brass-work hone, the water-line was a marvel of accuracy. They wondered what sort of a cove the new skipper would prove. One swore that a supernumerary always blatantly carried a crew,—it was odds to even this one would,—then stood back with the rest, patiently chewing sweet tobacco as a hansom emerged from the bridge and clattered to the gangway. A man and a woman alighted, the one in a heavy coat and evening dress, the other wrapped cosily in furs and carrying her train in one hand. They passed at once up the gangway, acknowledged the quartermaster's salute, and climbed to the promenade. All the world hereabouts knew the man, despite his mufti and turned-up collar. The police stood back with a lifted hand, heels at attention; the dock-gate men acknowledged him by a swift, finger-curved movement; the groups standing on deck and in the passages made haste to appear busy, raising a hand as they passed.

It was Callaghan, the *Sentinel's* captain, who had arrived, and with him that dark-eyed lady the crew had come to know—Helen Douglas.

"We are here first, at all events," said Callaghan as they moved up and down the promenade, arms linked and thoughtful; "I was afraid it would be the other way about. Gad! we had rather a rush, though. Not tired, Helena?"

"No."

"Cold?"

"Quite comfy, thanks, . . . but very impatient. . . . What do you think of it now?"

Callaghan half paused in his walk. There was mystification in his face—mystification in his voice. It was plain he did not know what to think. "*Quien sabe?*" he said. "I suppose I was wrong. It seems ridiculous, but the likeness is less apparent now the man is in evening dress; even the pose is not so noticeable. I can't account for it—honestly can't."

"What does the colonel say?"

"He says nothing."

"Does he watch him?"

"Rather; but he has not alluded to it. Oh, yes, he is as mystified as I am, at present—hallo! that's their cab. Come into my room. I will bring them to you. Mind, Sedgewick does not know you are here." He left her alone at this, and hastened to meet his friends.

Helen's nerves were strong, but they thrilled now. She was warmly clad in furs, yet she shivered. In truth there was something very uncanny in this notion which had been born of her desire—this searching of a man obviously alive and hearty for signals which should speak to his identity with that other who rested now beneath the snow on Bidston's slopes. What if it lay with her to identify him? Dick, apparently, no longer considered the thing possible; his attitude was shaken by the difference lent by dress clothes. What if she, by her greater knowledge of the man who had been her cousin, were compelled to speak—what if he were indeed masquerading, and she were able to pierce the incognito? It meant anguish for some, perhaps tragedy. Is there any limit to the possibilities in such a case—can any be set?

Helen acknowledged the difficulties, and rising, stood looking out of the open door. The tension troubled her. She was not afraid, but she wished the ordeal past. The quiet docks, laden with shipping all picked out in white and leaning boldly against the farther blackness, appealed to her artist's eye; but everything was so still, so calm, everything so full of the mystery of the great waters and the greyhounds which battle with them, that the colour scheme escaped her.

Across there, behind that grim stone wall, carts and rollies moved, snow-clad and picturesque over the cobbles, but no sound came. Down the dock-wall a group of men worked in the glare of the lamps; they looked like boy men set out by children to pass an hour. The city's voice was hushed by the cloak lying there so softly thick to smother it; the men who worked out there were dead. The stillness appalled her.

Again as she moved across the room little rills of motion rept through the ship,—the vibrating motion which is inseparable from shipboard, without which no ship can be said to live,—it ran there under foot, and brought the girl to a standstill. A hot flush embraced her. She was cold no longer; she stood there expecting miracles, listening for cataclysms, and instead came the voices of the three men marching down the deck to greet her.

They entered, to find her standing flushed, and with a hand pushing back the fur from her neck and arms, her long coat thrown open and revealing glimpses of the whiteness—Marchmont, Sedgewick, and Callaghan. The two first over the door-sill halted instinctively on seeing her, and Callaghan moved to the front, saying—

“Helen, allow me to present Mr Sedgewick—a friend who takes a great interest in ships and has some nasty things to say about their management. Sedgewick, Miss Douglas.”

The man bowed, and Helen found herself gazing into his face, holding out one hand and waiting for him to take it. He drew near at once, and Callaghan heard her say, ‘It is so pleasant to meet people who love ships,’ in the conventional tones of one stranger addressing another, and suddenly acknowledged he had looked for something else.

It was conceivable that a man who masqueraded under another name would trip when suddenly confronted with the girl who had been his playmate; it was conceivable he would give himself away, as the saying goes, and Callaghan looked to see it. Helen, although she had not foreseen it felt the probability. Marchmont, who was

also in the dark as to Helen's presence, obviously stood in dread.

But here was nothing dramatic, nothing appalling—no hint of loss of control. Sedgewick suddenly became aware of the hand and moved forward to touch it. He held his head high, looked into the dark eyes fixed so strangely upon him, and smiling, said, "I fear we all know so much of ships in Liverpool that we are blind to their perils. Do you often come down to see the boats go by?"

"Often," she nodded, her face alight at the notion; "the boats are my friends. I get pennies by trying to paint them."

"If one might hazard a guess from appearances," said Sedgewick, with a smile, "I should say the pennies are not difficult to get."

"Wrong—quite wrong," Helen flashed; "that's unearned increment—ask Dick."

"Dick?"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Callaghan."

There were three persons in this room all imbued with an idea, a notion, which neither was able to say was true or the reverse, and of them the girl alone appeared at ease, ready with the right word. The weaker sex! Well, and when you consider it, has not its weakness evolved that very subtle force we term tact, which in itself is a compound of all the forces which go to make strength in man.

"Dick" was not thrown out by accident, nor was Helen Douglas flustered at the miss so obviously registered: she slipped in a new cartridge and pulled the trigger again with—

"It was perhaps as well for Ethel and the kinders" (again a phrase from Norris's speech) "that there was an unearned increment, or things would have gone badly for us at the Cottage." And again a miss, two cartridges both barren of result, the bird not even winged. Sedgewick looked up a trifle nonplussed.

"Afraid I am a bit out of the running, Miss Douglas," he remarked, precisely—"Ethel and the kinders? The go? . . . Pray enlighten me."

"Dick," again," she announced unflinching. "Why,

what do you men find to talk about when you are together?" She half turned to Callaghan, smiled at his lack of readiness, and went on as though the heart which beat beneath that soft, white breast were cold and hard as flint.

"Ethel married my cousin, Arthur Norris," she explained, "and the kinders are his—Claire and Jacky—two of the dearest little plagues ever sent to bother aunties; and the Cottage is where we live. Surely Dick has mentioned so much?"

Apparently Dick had not. He shook his head. Marchmont fidgeted with his eyeglass, twisting it by the cord. But Helen refused to be flustered by these signals; she rose from the settee and drawing her furs about her said, "I should like a walk—do you mind coming on deck?"

Sedgewick accepted the invitation and they passed out to the promenade, the two men following and gradually dropping out of earshot.

"I think I ought to explain," said Sedgewick, as he fell into step, "that I am afraid my business leads me to talk shop—journalism, you know—and I have given Captain Callaghan very little opportunity to speak of his friends. Doubtless that is the reason I have heard neither of the lady you mention nor of the Cottage. Where is it?"

"Near Bidston Hill, overlooking the slope at the edge of Noctorum, you know."

"All Greek to me, Miss Douglas."

"You mean you don't know the Hill—Liverpool's playground?"

"No."

"Then you don't know one of the finest peeps in England," she assured him, searching him sidelong.

"I should like to make its acquaintance when I have time," he decided.

"Are you very busy, then?"

"Journalists who are not busy have very little vogue—and I . . ." he broke off with a gesture of despair.

"And you write of the sea and ships," said Helen with a swift turn; "that is curious. My cousin, Arthur Norris, wrote of ships and the sea also."

"Norris—Norris. . . Really, Miss Douglas, you must forgive me; but Norris meets me at every turn. What has he done?"

"I will show you," she answered swiftly. "Come into the cabin; Dick has a copy of his last book." She led the way, and, standing beneath an electric globe, found the volume and handed it for him to see.

"'Frayed Seams,'" he said softly. "That sounds pathetic." He glanced at the date, commented "Last year," and turned to the title-page, where Norris had placed George Eliot's phrase—"It is one thing to see your road, another to cut it." "Ah," he said, "that gives me light;" and again he turned the leaves, halting here, reading a sentence there, and commenting on its truth with a voice that spoke conviction.

He sat down engrossed. "There is something in the turn of the sentences which compels attention," he said. "May I have it to read? Ships are my hobby. This man knows of them from the inside. I should like to take it to my rooms."

Helen stood beside him watching him, seeking that sign, that indefinite sign, which should tell her, Aye or No, was this man masquerading? was he Norris, or was he some other—strangely like, yet some other? But no sign appeared. The face and head were of the same shape, the pose similar; but here were none of Norris's tricks—none of those subtle glimpses which spoke of Norris the dreamer, the man of far-away air and brooding disposition.

On the contrary, here was a man filled with precisely the same instincts, the same love of literature, the same overweening recognition of the picturesque; but he sat there giving voice to his opinions briskly, sharply, without hesitation, and without nervous iteration. This man had held in his hand a book some ten minutes, and already he had mastered the ability lying dormant amidst the words. Norris in similar conditions would have taken a day to discover those properties, perhaps a week to pronounce upon them. Oh, it was evident—evident—this man was not Norris. He was stronger, crisper, more

ready to appraise. He had no fear; his self-control was evident.

This Helen saw as he sat before her turning the pages; and at his question she almost started, then found voice with, "It is Dick's—Captain Callaghan's,—but I am sure he will lend it. I will ask him."

The personal note was gone; she recognised him as a stranger, and, turning from the room, went out to meet her friends marching glum and constrained about the promenade.

"Mr Sedgewick wishes to borrow Arthur's book, Dick—will you lend it?" she questioned, halting abruptly before them.

"Sedgewick wants it?" Callaghan repeated, searching her face.

"Sedgewick—eh?" Marchmont fussed with his eyeglass. "Good gracious! what can he want with it?"

"He wishes to read it. He is engrossed there in the cabin. I can't get a word from him."

Marchmont went swinging up the deck. "A matter for you to decide, Callaghan," he threw out over his shoulder as he passed. "If you want advice apply to some one else."

Callaghan took no notice. He faced Helen. "Well?" he said, and paused, watching her.

"Wrong, dear."

"Certain?"

"Quite. . . . Poor Arthur!" she sighed; then, taking Callaghan's arm, added, "I think, though, you had better not bring him to the Cottage. The likeness is sufficiently strong—and there is Ethel to consider."

That night, before they left, Callaghan had taken Sedgewick over the ship, and had explained in detail the matter of the *Coorong* collision, and had marvelled at Sedgewick's concise rejoinder.

"Hum! Faulty lights, old-world methods of signalling. The wonder to me is there are so few collisions." Then turning once more to the volume lying in the hollow of his arm, he added, "I suppose this has not had any sort of vogue?"

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"Very slight," Callaghan admitted.

"Precisely. Too good—well, I think I could make it go. Shall I try?"

"Do you think it is worth it?"

"Worth! Great Scot! I wish I had such stuff to review oftener. Here I can use superlatives, unless I am greatly mistaken. Leave it to me; we have a way of making the public bite whether they will or not—when we choose to use it."

"You will be cautious as to the author's death,—it might wake memories. . . ."

"Never fear; I shan't touch that. I go on what is written here," he tapped the book with his fingers; "any other method is vile art."

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

#### THE FALLING OF THE CURTAIN.

How the bells rang out, clanging on the freshness, cannoning amidst the hills, booming in the dales. How they reverberated rolling and echoing, hushed sometimes like muted strings, loud again with all the resonance of silver and brass,—it was as though Nature knew that a wedding was in progress, and had sent a clear day, a brisk day in our terrible English December, to carry the bell-sounds over the Wirral.

Now it had been given out authoritatively that the wedding was to be "a quiet one," and that undeniably had been the intention; but the bells had done their work. Since sunrise, at intervals, and now for an hour without ceasing, they had clanged cheerily over the house-tops, drowning conversation and frightening the daws from their lethargy. And as a concomitant, outside the great red sandstone church which dominates the peninsula were gathered the crowd which always flocks to a wedding



able to afford bells—the aristocracy and poverty of the district.

Since one o'clock they had begun to assemble—nurse-maids wheeling dainty evidences of matrimony in daintier chariots; errand boys pushing baskets of drugs and condiments to the homes they inhabit—homes which look so fat and are so tawdry. Red and yellow brick houses these, tucked away behind lawns edged with stiff iron-rims; where the bow windows are decorated with nice coloured tiles of blue and red, and the round-fronted conservatories have little panes of blue and yellow let into their waistcoats to mark the rotundities and palsy the colour schemes arranged by those "landscape contractors" of the north who decorate them.

Here, too, were policemen, porters, and spinsters all standing to worship at the shrine of a pairing, together with half the girls from the surrounding houses, and a goodly sprinkling of that profound curiosity known as Society in all great business centres. They stood there patiently listening to the bells, staring at the red baize spread from porch to pavement, and wishing themselves inside that church, which already was crowded with personages known as Somebodies in this world of rush and barter.

Thus the notion on which Marchmont and Ethel had plumed themselves was early nipped in the bud. A quiet wedding was anathema. Sir William McGee was opposed to it. A quiet wedding was a hole-and-corner arrangement—and if it were persisted in they might as well logically go to a registry office and have done with it. A magistrate. A county man—an officer, retired it is true, of his Majesty's much-maligned army—well, how was it possible? Was he by any chance ashamed of marrying, or was it Mrs Norris he studied—and in that case was it she who was ashamed?

The words had been spoken. Marchmont was not ashamed, Ethel was not ashamed; but, . . . well, as a result of importunate relatives, the bells had been ordered and the bells had done their work—clash, bang, hammer, clamour,—they were at it all day, and would continue to

wag far into the night. And when the bells were ordered a big gun of the church, a relative of Mrs Norris, was ordered also, as though he were something new and out of season, and must be obtained at any cost. Therefore, as you perceive, the quiet wedding had got somewhat out of hand, and a fussy one was in full swing. A motor-car wedding it might have been termed—for the tootling of horns vied with the rush of carriages to make the Bidston Road unsafe for any but the dead.

Two o'clock. A horn blast in the narrow, curved street; a whir and a rattle and a trio of cars came splashed and travel-stained from Thurstaston. The colonel here with some lady supporters, two or three men, evidently of the army, and a white-headed parson with a beard like a Druid. Behind again there throbbed M'Gee's great engine, Mercedes—brass-fronted, like a mammoth coffin on wheels—and in it the magnificent knight, the captain of industry, who rode down all men unable to face his purse at the courts.

The cars drew up at the red carpet, deposited their burdens upon it, and whisked into silence in the shadow of a neighbouring wall. Fifteen minutes passed, then again a pair of motors throbbed into view, coming from Noctorum. The bride and Callaghan in one, Helen and the children in the other. These, too, came to the thick red carpet, deposited their burden, backed, and ran grumbling to wait.

Immediately behind them, the horse jibbing at the crowded street, came a hansom with a couple of passengers—men sent from the office of 'The Hustler' and another paper to "do" a notice of the wedding. The first alighted—a fat young man with a flabby chin and a pince-nez; the second—Sedgewick—spruce, alert, bearing the half mark "gentleman," and showing no signs of his calling. He wore a big overcoat, collar turned up, and carried a stick. If he were going to write, it was evident from all that appeared that memory would suffice to produce the picture.

The two, met at the gates by several pressmen, passed into the church, and found places in the centre aisle, half

way to the door. Sedgewick remained in the porch, and was the last to enter. He took a place at the end of the pew where sat the other journalists. He seemed bored.

And in truth he was bored. A pageant he could describe sitting down with his notes on his knees—little jets of words these—signs cabalistic and mysterious, a sketch of some of the actors done in pencil. A scene from the river or ship life, from the docks, the hospitals, or the casual ward he could paint glowing and with details that burned—but this smooth, sleek business of a wedding was rather outside him. He loathed the rustle of femininity, the obvious preparation, the rouge, the powder, the thing spoken of by mankind as “paint,” and would have avoided it. But Broadwood wished to give his friend Marchmont a good send-off, as he termed it, and had cajoled Sedgewick to the office of scribe.

He took his seat as he had taken his seat in the cab, hands in pocket, preternaturally grim perhaps at the environment he found so distasteful. And the boredom of it especially lay in the fact that he would be compelled to say something pleasant, seeing he knew the principals, and could take no note of the blazoned vulgarity of this hulla-baloo and war-dance executed outside the church at a modern wedding.

That primarily lay in the forefront of his imagination. He had no experience of it otherwise than by these glimpses seen at the church doors, but a glimpse to a man of Sedgewick's calibre is like a volume of explanation to the unseeing: you can no more bring the two in line than you can bring in line the gentleman and the plutocrat. They are apart—wide as the poles.

The procession—bride, bridegroom, and all their attendants—had passed up the aisle before Sedgewick entered. They posed now at the edge of the chancel, and beyond was the high altar, where white-robed priests stood waiting. A dim shaft of light crossed the church at a sharp angle and fell upon the group pausing there beneath the dome. From a long way off, as it seemed, came the sound of a man speaking, of small pauses, breaks in the thread of his discourse, and jets of other voices filling the gaps.

Sedgewick, standing with hands thrust deep in pocket, made mental notes of the fact, wondered when they would sing, whether the choir was worth listening to, and stared at that shaft of light hovering over the group so far off, waiting in miniature at the approach to the altar.

It looked strange, almost fantastic, falling there in that curious way. It awoke in the man's mind the first glimpse of the picturesque, and he found himself watching with a keener relish this colonel whom he knew, and had unwittingly ruffled, making a fool of himself. It seemed curious that any man, not a born idiot, should be content to harness himself for life to a woman. There was no wisdom in it. Sedgewick's knowledge of courts of law, of newspapers, and of the necessity to which he was sometimes put of furbishing up filthy details in order that they might be palatable to a British public sitting down to its breakfast-table,—all these things had taken the glamour of marriage from him and left him sceptic. Yet, for a moment, as he stood there watching the ebb and flow of that shaft of light, a new sensation reached him. In his mind a phrase arose registering the fact that he had noted, so far, the only salient feature of this wedding from the inside—a shaft of light, heaven-born, radiant, and falling on the bride—Psha! Already he desired the end of this ceremony, so that he might face the bride and see whether she were worthy. Worthy! That was the necessity for all men. Were they good? Were they gentle—or were they like McGee, with his buzzing war-mammoth outside, ready to ride down all opponents not strong enough to give battle? Were they good? And for this decision it was necessary to see the face—to read what has been written by the hand of time—how much of goodness, gentleness, has been registered.

Again the voices, now far up by the altar, and then a pealing note from the organ. Who played? The man had a touch—a precision not usual with country organists. And the choir! They sang. Purely, delicately they rendered a fine old hymn, and Sedgewick's brain was at work registering the fact in lines double scored. They could sing—Jove, yes—they could sing!

Again came the voices speaking in that distant monotone. The people kneeled to pray. They rose—some one else was speaking, reading those still figures a homely whereof the text was marriage, the duty of man to his God, the duty of man to the world. It went on solemnly for a space. The clock set high without tolled the quarters, the voice ceased—there was a rustling of frocks; people craned their necks to see, and the bride made her way to the vestry.

Once before she had signed a register of similar character; once before had come from a vestry smiling, radiant in all the panoply of the woman who is beautiful and is able to wear trains and veils with *aplomb*. But this time she wore no veil, and her dress was not of white and silver, but grey—a travelling dress exquisite in tone and fit, with white fur on the shoulders and a white muff to shield those pretty grey-clad hands from the cold.

From the organ a march was booming, the march which accompanies all brides on their passage from church to home. From the belfry there came clashes of sound—the bells shouting to the world of the fact that another woman was wife, another man a benedict. And amidst the buzz of voices Marchmont led Ethel down the aisle. He walked on her left. She would pass the place where Sedgewick sat waiting for a glimpse of the face which should tell him her character. He leaned forward. Everybody apparently was imbued with the same idea. Everybody desired to see the face of the bride—some of those who were farthest from the line of march stood up on seats and hassocks. Sedgewick leaned forward. He rose and stood a trifle outside the pew-edge waiting,—and the pair came slowly into view.

A tall, willowy figure, with a full, round bust and a face so vivid and alive that Sedgewick started at the knowledge which instantly dawned. Goodness was there, gentleness, charity,—a woman with such a face must of necessity be a help to struggling humanity. He had no need to search for signals; they were there in the eyes, in the mouth, in the broad oval face, in the strong and resolute chin. A woman of endurance, a woman who

loved admiration—that he decided in his mind while yet she was far up the church. But still he watched the graceful form swaying so rhythmically to the march; watched those bright eyes flashing recognition here and there amidst the people; the finely poised head with the hair carrying coppery tinges in the coils—a woman who compelled attention.

She drew near, glanced a moment at the pew holding that group of penmen; passed over them as though they were not, and found a resting-place in the eyes of a friend far down towards the door. And as she moved on smiling, the subtle scent of violets accompanied her, making the air sweet about her.

The thing stole upon Sedgewick's senses, captivating him, holding him a moment in thrall. He stood there staring, a curiously tense expression in his eyes; his attitude that of one who searches for a notion, an idea which has dawned. A subtle essence! A vista of nature's heyday magically preserved for December. A scent he knew. A scent that had been with him in some place, . . . some place other than this, . . . some place where there were trees and conservatories and a winding avenue of beech and larch and elm—some place . . .

The man's brain throbbed. Deep in the nerve centres a chord had been struck, and the neurons, quick to respond, flashed back the signal—Known! known!

A long silent chord, a chord on the verge of death, but now responding vigorously,—Known! known! Sedgewick thrust out one hand, turning round to examine the vanishing group, and a brother scribe touched his arm with—

"Anything wrong?"

"Wrong!" came the answer, irascible, nervous, "Good Lord, no,—why?"

"Nothing. Thought you had seen a ghost, that's all."

Seen a ghost! The man would have hit nearer the truth if he had suggested the scenting of a ghost; but Sedgewick took no heed. He left the pew, made his way slowly up the aisle, and countered a verger, old, grey with set face, at the vestry door.

"Who is the lady?" he questioned suddenly.

The man lifted hand to ear, smiling grimly. "Which of 'em, sir? . . . there's more than one," came dryly from lips that were cracked.

"The one just married to Colonel March . . . March . . ."

"Marchmont?"

"Quite so."

The grey one slyly coughed.

"Oh,—her!" he said. "Well, an' I thowt aal the world knew Mrs Norris, wife of the captain as . . ."

"Norris—Norris; eh, sure?"

"Sure as I'm standin' in this 'Ouse of God," said the cracked voice with deliberate emphasis, pulling up his bent form.

Norris—Norris; always Norris. The brain centre grasped the fact, but found some difficulty. Norris—Norris,—Good Lord! it was always this same maddening name. . . . "Why, where is it, . . .?" Sedgewick commenced, and as suddenly paused. A notion assailed him. Deep in the cells a suggestion stirred. He saw the old, dried man formulating further sentences. Heard a confused buzz of words, and turned on his heel, leaving a shilling in the outstretched palm.

The curtain had fallen,—a curtain obscuring his vision,, rendering his action, his environment, his identity in a sense obscure. There was something to be done. He had come for that purpose,—what was it, . . . and ~~where~~ had he come?

A numbness seized him. He could not think. Words, talk, chatter! Sedgewick wanted none of them. He desired to be alone, to get out of this house, where an organ brayed unceasingly of the paths of Edeff; where people clamoured to stare into the face of a bride; a place which resounded with the roar of bells eternally clanging.

Down the aisle, out at the porch, threading the throng staring at a vanishing group of motors all dashing up the road, Sedgewick passed head bent, hands deep in pockets, brain at work.

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At work, but dizzy; alert, but buzzing with the confused roar of hazardous suggestions; active, and already praying for rest, for silence, for a vista of peace, a touch that should put him right with that thing which dangled enticing, retreating, twisting, backing—that violet-scented figure which had sprung upon him, and now evaded the issue.

The issue! That was what he desired to see, to get at grips with,—the issue. But over his mind lay the grey curtain which had fallen: a veil, to all intents opaque, which yet admitted glimmerings of the life beyond.

Sedgewick passed from the road, and discovered a way which seemed familiar. He trod its path, the crisp snow crunching under heel. Overhead the trees arched limbs bare of leaf. The wind swept screaming through them. He came to an open space where he could see over the gorse slope an array of hills, fields, a village or two, and some isolated clumps of trees.

It was winter. The sun had disappeared, a ball of fire sinking in low-lying, jagged clouds—clouds which presently were angry, which took the form of a copper fortress, copper turrets, copper outworks, copper bastions. And behind it all lay the green and gold of a sky suddenly alive above the purple country sleeping solemnly in the foreground.

The purple country! A keen wind swept over it with an edge that cut.

~~Still~~ Sedgewick pressed onward, going towards the sun.

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE LIFTING OF THE GREY CURTAIN.

Night on the Wirral, and Sedgewick toiling up a hill-side approaching houses with windows of flame. From the path he trod down there in the valley they peered out



upon the darkness, beckoning him to come and feast his eyes. Beside them at intervals were the tall white lamps, and reaching down from them were the long gardens of suburbia, dotted with summer-houses, conservatories, and clumps of trees.

Sedgwick moved up to gain a nearer view. There was in this dark landscape a touch of the familiar, in what he could not say; but it stood as the concomitant of that violet-scented figure which had appeared to him. A reminder of things long lost, of scenes dropped out of cognisance, of moments mysteriously disappeared from the book of memory.

He searched the roadway, striving to come in touch with something definitely intelligible, something that should break the thread of this torture—this curtain drawn about the senses which was not entirely blank, but which gave glimpses as of a picture seen in a dim and fantastic light, when the eye can appraise nothing at its true value and when the intelligence swims in misty solitudes striving to pierce the veil.

He came up the road and found presently, at a gap in the trees, a finger-post by a stile whereon was printed this legend—

“Footpath to Bidston.”

Footpath to Bidston. . . . Footpath. The words rolled menacingly in his ears. They took dim and fantastic shapes, leaping one upon the other like seas charging a beach and falling back in a smother of foam—~~foam~~.

It was the name of a place he knew. The name of . . . of a place of which he had spoken with . . . with—

“Manes! manes!” The man stretched out his hands struggling to see, calling out in his anguish for remembrance; then, with a sudden movement, pressed forward to stare into the dark, tree-shadowed track. Down there was a little glimpse of blue. A vision of the sky left open by the trees. Nothing else. No light. No hint of light—only the throbbing brain, the sound as of a tendon snapped, and a flutter of the grey curtain. The blank, grey curtain which enveloped him and kept him blind to the meaning of that sentence he now recognised as a part

## The Lifting of the Grey Curtain.

of the past from which mysteriously he had escaped, from which he had been flung by some monstrous and overpowering force, some dynamic misplacement of the laws of being.

What was it that he sought? Was it tangible? Did it exist?

He pressed one hand to his brow. It was damp, clammy to the touch, yet his pulses throbbed, his flesh burned. He drew his coat closer about him, marvelling at the necessity which compelled the action. He was an automaton desiring to do things, to see and examine things which some power held from him. For a moment it seemed possible that he was dead. He struck one hand smartly to discover how far he was dead, and recognised in the gush of anguish that he was alive at all events to pain. Alive, and yet he could not think. Alive, and still that monstrous sense of oppression, of being forced to do mechanically things the dead brain refused to acknowledge.

Appalling!

The word fell sharply as he stood there staring into the dusk. He recognised that it was he who had cried out, and instantly became desirous of speech with some one who might help him in this tragedy he faced. He stretched out his hands, crying aloud to the night—"Give me light! Give me light, oh my God!"

Again and again he reiterated the prayer—he who scoffed at it—"Give me light! Give me light, or I am mad."

Mad! Once more the phrase struck home. Was he mad? Could he think connectedly? Could he trace a sequence of events?

He pressed up the roadway and came to the junction of five, all white under their carpet of snow, all shadowed by firs, pines, behind which lurked the homes of the rich.

Which way must he go? Where was he? How came he in this God-forsaken country where no cabs moved, where no men travelled, and where, apparently, the path was haunted by the ghost of a woman in grey, and

pricked off by finger-posts all duly docketed and labelled with names he did not know?

Again he examined one of them, and again unwittingly it spoke. "To Noctorum," it said. Noctorum! Well, and where on earth was Noctorum? What haunted paradise did Noctorum veil? Were its inhabitants crazed that they gave it so bedlamish a name? What ghosts walked there clanking chains? . . .

The questions surged one upon the other, swamping thought. He stood solemnly considering what he must do; then, for no reason, turned up the road, wearily arguing against it. Vainly stamping his anger, annoyed, embittered, nervously irritable at the tags of knowledge he possessed, he moved on and came again to that stretch of gorse land overlooking the distant mountains,—the place he had passed at sunset.

He saw it now in new colouring. Far down over the hills a dim white light had risen. The waning moon hung there just drawing through the mists of earth, just peeping white from the ruddiness of birth. The man paused, leaning against the railings. He was weary. Nature cried out for food and rest, but the throbbing brain acknowledged no such necessity. It was engrossed with the shadows peeping and retiring behind that grey curtain which had fallen.

A man and a girl approached and Sedgewick turned to speak. They halted as he addressed them, staring into his face with a tinge of surprise.

"Where is Noctorum?" he questioned.

"This is the beginning of it . . ."

"No, no, I recognise that; but where is Noctorum situated?"

He might with equal point have asked what was the name of that planet drawing a line of silver beyond the moon glare. They stared, and the man said, "It's over there," he waved his hand, "and it's part of Birkenhead, I suppose."

"And where is Birkenhead?"

The man looked up with a touch of annoyance. He objected to being guyed in the presence of his girl.

"Birkenhead 's over there, an' Birkenhead 's a town in Cheshire, an' I shouldn't wonder if there 's a lunatic asylum somewhere nigh hand to it."

He turned on his heel, the girl giggled on his arm. They passed down the gorse plot, the man mollified by the fact that he had scored.

But the knowledge born in Sedgewick's brain at this encounter bade him hold no further intercourse with strangers lest—well, at that moment all things, the pit itself, seemed possible. He passed up the roadway, came to a gate marked with a name which blazoned a moment through the veil—Rockaby, then fell away and was lost in a maze of contradictions.

He moved again, and again a name smote him, one of those grandiose labels with which we besprinkle our suburban gateways, Holmby Grange. Sedgewick regarded the thing with annoyance. He saw that behind gilt-tipped gates was a modest house standing at the back of a lawn and shrubbery, but Holmby Grange! and the gilt! Where, he questioned, moving irascibly on, where is their sense of proportion? or is it humour they lack?

Again an entrance. A sheltered, tree-shadowed gateway standing beside the path, the walls covered with lichen, the gate toned by the hand of time. Beyond it there appeared an avenue, and as he paused there oppressed by a sense he could not analyse, a motor car came slowly down the drive. He stood aside to let it pass, caught a glimpse of the people it carried, and saw it vanish snorting up the road he had traversed.

But the car did not hold him. What held him he could not have explained. He walked in an avenue, tree-shadowed, strangely familiar, and at the end of it moved the woman who was his companion; the woman who appeared so ethereal, so visionary, yet had the pose and the attitude of one he knew.

He stretched out his hands towards it and passed up the drive. The figure melted into the doorway of a yellow-washed, ivy-clad house and vanished.

He stood alone now, searching the oak. Upon it was an old brass knocker; beneath, a beaten brass plate

carrying the words, Heath Cottage: Sedgewick regarded it with misgiving. There was something here, something definite, something he vaguely recognised. But the door blocked further progress and it seemed necessary to enter.

He did not ring. The thought never stirred. He put out one hand and twisted the brass knocker. The door opened. It seemed at that moment that he knew that by twisting the knocker the door would open. He paused on the threshold of this house and stared into a hall lighted by twin ruby lamps: oak surrounding it, oak flooring it, walls of polished wainscoting all covered with trophies, and at the far end, near the fire, a chair of a curious shape.

He drew a long sobbing breath; it seemed at that moment that he knew this hall. He closed the door, and crossing, sat down in the chair facing the fire: staring into the red heart of it, watching the crackling embers. From the high mantel-shelf there drifted the subtle scent of violets. The hall was saturated with it, a delicate, soul-pervading essence.

The fact struck him. It was impossible to escape it. The issue was before him, dazzling his senses, tearing at the flimsy fastenings of the curtain, angrily pushing it aside. The issue! God in heaven! Was there no rest—no peace—no possibility of peace?

He faced swiftly about, and his eye fell upon an old gate-legged table whereon lay a book, grey-covered and unsoiled. It seemed that he knew that book, and he stretched out his hand to take it. On the back of it was printed in gold lettering—

### FRAYED SEAMS.

ARTHUR NORRIS.

And as he lifted it light sprang upon him, blinding him by its appalling directness, burning him as with the agency of red-hot metal.

He examined the title-page mechanically, saw the same wording, and suddenly dropped it.

Arthur Norris. Frayed Seams. And so . . . this, apparently, was the book he had reviewed and sent into circulation as Sedgewick—he who was Arthur Norris *in esse*, the man who had fallen away and disappeared.

He leaned forward, chin in hand, searching the fire.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## WHISKY JOHNNY.

•For perhaps an hour Sedgewick remained staring into the fire and striving to solve this problem which fate had pressed upon him.

He sat in the Buddhist chair. The fact alarmed him not at all. It was a chair in which any sane man might sit without danger. Of this he was assured. Once before he had sat in it praying for light, praying for direction, and Helen had come down and tried to bring peace to him; now he sat there without misgiving, without dread. On that day when magically he had regained control some part of him had escaped. Mentally and physically he was stronger—but, also, he was sceptic.

Beside him on the walls were the evidences of his career, the trophies collected by his father, by himself. They touched him in no way, unless the recognition of their presence in the midst of a chaos of thought can be said to touch. •But another matter throbbed for solution. Upstairs were the children, Jacky and Claire. Upstairs, too, Helen might be busy with her painting. Upstairs, in Ethel's room, would be the violet-laden atmosphere that was hers. He dared not face these possibilities; but the children! His heart yearned towards the small pink-clad shrimps his wife had given him. He stretched out his hands shivering beside the blaze. How could he leave them?

Memories stole about him. The cabin where his wife

worked appeared out there in the shadows by the clock; the chart-room, where in rough weather the kinders played, was here at his feet. The gale, the lashing of rain, the curl of seas rose up to greet him, and he remembered how, on that night of nights, Jacky had seated himself on one knee announcing his desire that it should blow, holding grimly to his hand the while; how Claire had clung silently beside him, gripping his knee. The kinders! The small playfellows he had carried pick-a-back down the avenue, which an hour ago had seemed so strangely peopled with shadows he could not pierce.

He leaned forward, chin in hand, a replica of the Norris of long ago, fire-gazing, seeking as he had sought in the past some method of escape, some method of oblivion. He was dead. Ethel had remarried. He must remain dead. That was his necessity. The question which drummed for decision was—how?

He sat leaning forward and staring into the fire.

A long while he remained thus sunk in thought, unravelling the strands; then a door opened somewhere in the back, and footsteps approached. A maid entered the hall and moved to tend the fire. She paused with a sudden start on seeing a man bent there beside it; but instantly recovered as he looked up to say—

"My name is Sedgewick. I had an appointment with Miss Douglas about a book which I have left in my rooms. I found the door on the latch and came in. When does Miss Douglas return?"

"Not before twelve, sir."

"Where has she gone?"

"To Sir William M'Gee's, sir, with Captain Callaghan."

Sedgewick looked over his shoulder.

"A dance or something, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

He turned again and picked up the poker. The maid was a stranger to him. He stirred the fire roughly, head bent. "And Colonel Marchmont," he said, "when did Colonel Marchmont and his—his wife go away?"

"About three o'clock, sir; they had to catch the . . ."

He fell upon the sentence with a new question—"Ah,

ely—"Mrs Marchmont seems happy, . . . bright, all that sort of thing, eh?"

he maid smiled, arching her brows—"I never saw her so happy, sir—but then . . ."

he poker fell with a crash in the grate, and Sedgewick ed up to say, "Quite so. Yes, naturally. Well, I sorry to have missed Miss Douglas. Tell her so when returns, and . . . er . . . I have often heard of the children, Jacky and Claire. I wonder, now, if you would mind letting me see them, just a minute, eh?"

The maid appeared a trifle astonished. "Well, sir," she said, "but they're in bed."

"Of course. That doesn't matter . . . just a peep, eh?"

The idea seemed to present no insuperable bar. Sedgewick rose a little stiffly from his chair, and they passed together to the night nursery, where a dim screened lamp discovered the twin cots facing fireward. The girl advanced softly and stood with lifted hand—

"S-s-sh!" she whispered, "they are barely sound."

Sedgewick paused in the darker space and remained mute.

Jacky lay before him asleep, with a ship at his feet. Claire lay there coiled into a knot, a doll cuddled in her arms, a hard-headed doll with a mass of towsted hair. The two bright-faced babies his wife had given him lay before him, eyes closed, lips apart, rosily content and sleeping lightly.

The maid drew near and touched Claire's cheek with her hand. The child stirred, smiling to greet her—

"Mamsie!" she whispered, and returned to shadowland. But Jacky, when the maid tried him, instantly twisted in his bed, and leaning on one arm demanded—

"Sing, dearmiss!"

Silence in the room, Sedgewick fighting for control, the maid trying to hush the boy to sleep. But he looked up, caught a glimpse of her face, and said—"You, nursie?" Then with a small catch in his voice, "Dearmiss can't sing—you sing."

He leaned over crooning a lullaby, but Jacky re-



sented the notion vigorously—"No, not that old fmg, . . . Whisky Johnny like dearmiss sings."

The nurse glanced over at the man standing there in shadow and caught his eye. Sing it, if you can, was the command she read, and she turned smiling to obey this strange personage who took an interest in sleeping children and would not have them crossed. She turned, and leaning forward began to sing the naïve, crooning song of the old *Coorong*. A breath of the sea came out of the stillness, a sound as of groaning yards, and Sedgewick paused entranced.

"Oh, whisky's here and whisky's there—  
Whisky ! Johnny !  
Oh, whisky's here and everywhere—  
Whisky for my Johnny."

Cold tremors ran down Sedgewick's back ; the voice was soft and pure, the intonation very natural. It might easily have been Ethel who sang—Ethel who was now . . . He closed his lips and stood rigidly to listen.

"Oh, whisky made me pawn my clothes—  
Whisky ! Johnny !  
And whisky gave me a spotted nose—  
Whisky for my Johnny."

Jacky's head nodded to the sound of tramping feet, shuffling at the halliards ; the voice went on—

"Oh, whisky killed my poor ole dad—  
Whisky ! Johnny !  
And whisky drove my mother mad—  
Whisky for my Johnny."

Jacky gave a sigh of supreme content and rolled over on his side.

"Sanks," he said, "that's a lovely song ; please give me my ship."

"No," said the nurse. "You know you mustn't have it on your pillow."

The boy rose to seize it, and caught sight of the tall, strange figure.

"Who's you ?" he demanded, brought to bay.

"Harold Sedgewick."

"What knows Auntie Helen, and . . . took her on the *Sentinel*?"

"Yes"

"I love ships," said Jacky. "Mayn't I call Claire?"

"No; I am going now . . . er . . . and if you are very quiet and go to sleep at once, perhaps you will find a new ship to-morrow evening."

Jacky lay over at once, his eyes dancing.

"Couldn't it be morning?" he questioned, swiftly counting the intervening hours.

"No; scarcely. You see the—the shops are shut to-night, and I have to get over the water, . . . now go to sleep, eh?"

Sedgewick crossed the room, and leaning beside Claire kissed her lightly on the cheek; then as the maid drew back he moved to Jacky's side.

"Good-bye, old chap," he said, and held out his hand.

But Jacky rose on his arm, holding up his lips. "I want to fank you," he said, "for that lovely ship you's goin' to send me." Two fat arms went out, caught Sedgewick round the neck, and a sounding kiss echoed through the stillness.

"Fank you," he reiterated, "ever so much, Mr Swedgewick"; then with a note of surprise, and drawing one hand across his cheek, "Why, I b'lieve you 's crying."

And Sedgewick, with a great show of merriment stifled for fear of rousing Claire, crossed the room, found the door, and passed downstairs into the hall. And here the nurse presently found him standing before the picture of one of his ancestors, a brawny warrior whose breast was strung with medals.

He turned round on hearing her approach, and taking up his hat and stick advanced to the door.

On the threshold he paused, and fumbling in his pocket, found a coin. He pressed it into the girl's hand. "Thanks," he said, "for letting me see them. Be good to them—eh?"

Then as the maid promised he put on his hat, stepped towards the drive, halted, turned, and said, "By the way,

. . . er . . . I wonder whether you have any notion how long it is since . . . since . . . since Captain Norris died—eh, what?”

“About two years, sir; . . . but I wasn’t . . .”

“Of course not, or I should . . . er ? . . . two years, eh?” A note of laughter touched his voice, and he turned about, saying, “By Jove, eh? Two years . . .?”

The maid stared. In her hand rested a piece of gold. She had no words at the moment with which to express her gratitude—or surprise. She closed the door swiftly, and Sedgewick passed down the white path and came once more to the road—the wintry road beside his home, the home of his fathers, shadowed by trees nodding bare of leaf from grounds which were his—a road leading tortuously to the vanishing village, and thence to the cars waiting at stations to carry travellers riverward.

One, halting there in the snow-glare, took up a passenger called Sedgewick. It expressed no astonishment, saw him safely to a seat on the upper deck, thrilled, and resumed its journey; but when the ferry took him over the Mersey running cold under the moon, it was Norris who walked the decks—alone, head bent, eyes searching the planks—Norris the dreamer.

And far in the south at that moment a train drew up on the Admiralty Pier at Dover, and Marchmont with Ethel on his arm moved up to their rooms at the old Lord Warden.

To-morrow they would be crossing Channel.

To-morrow Norris also would be crossing—whitherward?

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE CROSSING.

But a crossing, in that sense, is difficult, perhaps especially difficult to men of Norris’s temperament. In hot blood it might be possible, but in cold—Pish! the sug-

gestion annoyed him. Suicide, an opportunity for jurors to promulgate a lie! Only fools and cowards, he decided, take the plunge in cold blood; yet, having reached the landing-stage he walked its length as he had walked the ferry's deck, head bent, eyes searching the wooden footway where in daytime thousands press.

The stage sees many types. The rich man, escaping the noise and jar of life in America, crosses it *en route* for his saloon, waiting to carry him Londonward; the plutocrat, weighted with furs and harassed by cablegrams, crosses it on his way for the winter at Monte Carlo; the aristocrat governors of English colonies pause here on their way to that Greater England beyond the seas; but the majority who cross and recross its boards are the people who live on the Cheshire shore, the business men of Liverpool, their wives, sisters, daughters, who come to seek bargains in Liverpool shopland, and that vast host which appears always at great centres who have nothing to do, and do it methodically.

But at eleven o'clock the stage is swept bare of all these: business men are at home or going thither, the women have retired from shop-staring, and only the outcasts remain. Sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, they prowl the edge of the great waterway, staring at the sheeny river, watching the passing shipping, and make appointments with those who batten on their misery.

To-night the keen wind and snow-clad hills had swept the stage of humanity, and Norris could walk and think at leisure. Even the giant policeman who stands far down by the riverside station seemed to have vanished. Norris could have chosen no better night if he desired that crossing. A slight divergence from the beaten track, a step over the chains where they sagged loose, and a plunge. That was the whole necessity. Five minutes in that cold water swirling muddily seaward, and the crossing was complete. He would never return. The world would forget him.

He approached the grim piles, standing slimy and corroscated with barnacles at the end of the stage, and stood looking down. The water gurgled amidst the angle-irons

tying the structure, it slobbered beneath the pontoon he footed, it hissed seething amidst the moorings dabbling in and out the mud lying there inshore of him. Cold, damp, slime-covered, dark—the place rang hollow for want of a victim; swift, slate-hued, thick with garbage, the river clucked back at him, mocking him, calling to him as once in that dead past—from which for a while he had escaped—it had called urging him to examine the diamonds tumbling there in the yeast. But now there were no diamonds, only the water charged with offal from the cities it swept.

Cluck—cluck—gurgle - gurgle — oom - ooommm . . . ooommmmm!

The thing fascinated him. A river song. A lullaby. The droning boom of swirling waters echoing in the pontoon. It captivated Norris. He stood there regarding the eddies, his mind at work, his attitude that of one who weighs expedients. He was weary,—out there in five minutes he would be at rest. He desired peace, peace for himself and for Ethel and for the kinders. If he lived their happiness would constantly remain imperilled. A chance meeting, a recoil of “the wave of fate,” and misery. That he acknowledged standing staring into the depths—misery, anguish, courts of law.

He was cold. The tremors rose. At the back of his head was a lifting, a ruffling of the hair. He stared into the dark.

The water spewed muddily at his feet. He examined the circling eddies. In the centre of each were atoms which swirled seeking the vortex. The vortex! He put out his hands and moved to the edge. The vortex! God! It meant peace—peace. He crept nearer, nearer, already a foot was lifted which would have solved this problem he faced, but it was not completed. Suddenly, swiftly he drew back and stood trembling on the brink of despair.

A touch, a gleam of memory, and the man had regained mastery, the coward was beaten back. A gleam, perhaps heaven-given, and he stood shivering. Jacky had been promised a ship. If he . . . if that—that thing had happened the child would have gone short of his present.

And he looked for it, waited for the afternoon of to-morrow to bring it.

Norris crept back, recrossed the chains and stood staring riverward. A steamer moved out there spangled with points of flame like a toy ship lighted for Christmas. She hooted on her whistle and the sound ran echoing about the deserted sheds, booming amidst the pontoons. It gave the last blow to that thought born of the contact of misery and forgetfulness. He saw the thing which had stolen upon him and angrily turned up the stage. Salt tears blinded him. There was nothing he could do, only wait, wait. And waiting meant thought, anguish, danger to those he loved, but Jacky would get his ship; Claire too must find something in that parcel, pretty girlish Claire.

• He came up the stage at quick step, humming a line of that song he had heard,

“Oh, whisky killed my poor ole dad!”

Psh! The notion! And that child found it a lullaby! Well, whisky would not kill him, at all events to-night. For was there not a ship to purchase and send off on its voyage to Noctorum?

Norris walked up the stage with the air of a man to whom time is money.

To-morrow came; a grey day, with the smoke of Liverpool shut down upon the town, the streets cavernous, the shops ablaze with light—light which streamed through door and window tinging the smoke with splashes of yellow.

At sunrise the town was grey; at eleven ochre; at noon the cars crept ghostlike down streets charged with carbon. • They flitted past lighted by electricity, clanging on their gongs and driving foot-passengers in crowds to the shelters.

But Norris heeded nothing of this. He had passed through other infernos, and he was occupied in searching for that ship. Things in the likeness of ships he could find at nearly all emporiums—caricatures of ships and boats, steamers with little tin paddles and shores

## in Space.

to their hulls to keep them balanced. These were offered; but a ship or a steamer would recognise as being plausibly lifelike—as the difficulty. Norris moved from shop to shop, questions, throwing out sarcasms, chaff, and open ~~was a sham~~—still no ship was to be found. He left Bold Street and the beaten tracks and came by tram through the darkness to Scotland Road, and there, in a dingy thoroughfare abutting on this Edgeware Road of Liverpool, he came upon a prize—a model ship, rigged and sparred correctly. He entered the shop, bargained with a frowsty woman in an apron and gaudy ear-drops, and came away hugging his purchase cased and ready for despatch. After that, the purchase of a baby doll with a monumental outfit was simply and swiftly accomplished. This child of the shops was pink-faced, blue-eyed, and wore hair that was labelled “real.” It cried, too, with a jerky and rather brassy voice—“Just like many of the ladies do now, sir, as you may have noticed,” the girl informed him, smiling. And Norris, delighted again with this find, had no words for the impeachment, but bargained for speed, a case, and a messenger to carry the things to Noctorum.

Then out through the streets charged with carbon and roaring with the burden of modern traffic, out to the ferry, across the river and up the slopes—up, up, until Noctorum was in view, and the cab halted at Norris’s desire. They dismounted: the boy went onward, and Norris remained pacing the dark footway.

Fog, slush, atmosphere thick and choking. Pish! what weather—what weather for suffering humanity! People passed in the gloom, their faces strained and worn: heavy-eyed women; men pasty, tired of chaffering; here and away came a young girl daintily lifting her skirts, here and away a group sloshing, careless of the mire. But Norris saw no one: he walked head bent, waiting for the reappearance of his messenger.

He came at length—a perky, board school child, with the manners of the people—took his gratuity without a smile, without a “Thank you,” and strolled off whistling, hands in pocket.

Norris moved on also. The day seemed suddenly to have become burdensome, life purposeless. He glanced at his watch,—three o'clock. It appeared that now he would be the better for lunch.

He passed over to Liverpool to obtain it.

He ate ravenously, then sat drumming with his knife. He was alone in the coffee-room of a small hotel, with nothing to do, and a waiter observant of his attitude in a curtained alcove near the door. That was the appalling fact he faced. Nothing to do—absolutely nothing; nor any desire. All complete, maskee. Have done, . . . the book shut.

He could write; but of what avail was writing to a man whose personality was a haphazard commodity dependent on the freak of his brain? Twice he had climbed. In two different branches of literature he had mounted swiftly to the front and fallen prone. He lacked initiative now, being Norris. As Sedgewick, despite the clamour of editors, he was unable to continue.

He lacked that one essential quality—balance; the quality which marks the strong man out and sets him in authority over the weak. A moment it might be and he would again be a person over whose actions he had no control; a mountebank, perhaps, masquerading as somebody, when in reality the somebody he was was dead. What was to be the end of all this? Could he go on indefinitely changing place, as it were, with himself? Could he—and if so, who next would he be?

He remembered now the doctor's opinion, "Settle down somewhere quietly out of the rush. No whisky, no gaieties, no worry—absolute rest and strict regimen, . . ." and his answer came back to mock him—"Might just as well be dead." That still held true. He was not prepared to alter his opinion. There was nothing to do

nothing but wait. As Norris he had died; as Sedgewick again he had died—now, as Norris he continued to mark time. What would be the upshot? Would there be any?

He thrust out his hands and rose from the table. It



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He thrust out his hands and rose from the table. It

seemed necessary to move, to walk, to search the dreary streets—to mark time; therefore he rose, paid his bill, and crossed swiftly to the pavement fronting St George's Hall.

The giant building stood out of the fog appallingly sombre, shadowing the hurrying crowds. It was the place whence once he had emerged at a magistrate's decree—a man ruined and ready for burial, a man of the sea upon whom a man of the counter had passed sentence with pursed lips.

The thing rose up again in Norris's mind. Not an incident, not a sentence of that harsh judgment had been wiped out. It stood in letters of fire, burning in a brain amazingly quick to respond. He saw the whole of that monstrous trial; heard his own abortive attempts to put this matter of a collision on the high seas into the brain of a controller of stores; saw Harrod's face of dismay, caught a hint of the web in which he was enmeshed, and turned his back on the Hall, stretching out arms to the heavens.

Nothing to do and all eternity to do it in—that, at the moment, engrossed him. Nothing to do, and for all time to listen to that gross man who rolled out anathemas upon sailors who appeared to him in the light of those other malefactors he judged.

It was Norris who faced the blackness now. ° Norris the dreamer, the irascible, the artist who could paint with words and leave a sound on the cold page like the roar of the sea. Norris who had won fame and never worn it; Norris who had sunk in the fight against justice; Norris who had stood in his wife's room and heard her decision unflinching—the Norris who had come across the Goree and James Street Junction and danced buoyantly clear of the trollies and trams.

And now he moved unseeing. Hands thrust out, head sunk, he moved into the roar of the traffic, crossing a line of cars. A two-decker bound from the London Road came whirring out of the sulphurous murk, gongs clanging, wheels rasping, and in front of it, by some amazing destiny, lying in the roadway, was a child of the gutter, a child who apparently had slipped in the mire.

There had been a day in Norris's career when at the sight of a charging mass he had leaped and forgotten his manhood. What instinct bade him do this thing had never seemed plain to him. He acknowledged the fact and left it for others to analyse; but now he did not jump—at least for safety. He sprang forward, caught the wisp of rags and rolled her clear, then curiously fell prone himself, struggled to his feet, stumbled, remained inert, and the car was upon him.

A roar of shouting fell upon his ears, an amazing tide of direction, the clanging of gongs, the squeal of brakes, and—jolt—gr-r-r-r-r—thud.

The work of a minute of time.

The car halted. Crowds formed. Electricity flashed and machinery groaned—but the man was still.

He lay now at the edge of the crossing.

Far down amidst the streets by the docks is a hospital where they patch and piece broken humanity for further fight with this difficult war of life; and here in a ward, spotless and airy, attended by a sweet-faced sister, lay Arthur Norris, struggling to live and unwisely garrulous of details long hidden.

Some days had elapsed since that night of smoke and fog and cavernous uproar which had ended opposite the Hall of Justice whence Norris was flying. Minutes had been occupied bringing him to a theatre filled with students anxious to perfect themselves in this matter of amputation, this cutting away of limbs no longer available for duty; minutes filled with the grit of steel running in bone; of gasping breath, of sudden cries for clips, sponges, knives, then a man lay before them breathing and sick. Hours since then had vanished the way of all time, and now if the tortured trunk survived it would require perhaps a go-cart, perhaps a bath-chair, to enable it to take an airing. But Norris was happily oblivious of this or any other destiny. He refused to rally; seemed content on making several things plain, but always halted and remained honestly an enigma to those who desired to send for "his people."

Little touches of experience came out; scraps of his world-wide knowledge—now a sentence from the book he had written and boomed to fame; now a jumbled narrative of collision and courts of law, of a wife who could not understand, and a terror named Flynn who had struck him down, robbed him of clothes and watch, and sent him naked to sea. A sketch of a sinking collier followed, of the escape of some, and then in all seriousness the man wandered off in the path of Journalism.

The nurses listened and strove to piece together these fragments, but until 'The Hustler' was mentioned they lacked the key; for always until then the meaning of those papers he carried in a little tin case had escaped them.

Once for an hour he talked quietly of a girl called Ethel. A soft mood was upon him, and the name fell reverently from his lips; then again it changed, and a war of incident culled from the streets, the slums, and the docks fell upon the astonished room—and again and again he reverted to that name, speaking it with a lingering touch that was pitiful to hear. "Ethel . . . Ethel! One minute before you decide—let us face it—face it—eh, what? . . ." then again, "Ethel, . . . Ethel, . . . Ethel—oh my God! you won't let me go!"

A group of doctors came down the ward and stood with the sister at his bedside. One stooped over examining him, taking notes of the ebbing strength, the flagging pulse. He looked up, shaking his head, "Heard anything?" he questioned; "have the papers given any clue?"

"Yes, Mr Broadwood has been here. He was on the staff of 'The Hustler.' . . . Mr Broadwood desires us to let him know at once if there is any change."

"Broadwood, eh? A journalist then, . . . ring him up. He had better come round quickly."

A nurse moved to obey.

"And his people," the doctor pursued. "Broadwood know anything?"

"Nothing, sir. Except that his name is Sedgewick."

The voice broke out again, singing feebly Jacky's lullaby—

Oh, whisky's here and whisky's there—

Whisky! Johnny!

Oh, whisky's here and everywhere—

Whisky for my Johnny.

Oh, whisky killed my poor ole dad . . .

Wrong there, old chap. Whisky didn't get a look in, you know.

And whisky drove my mother mad . . .

Wrong—wrong. A parcel of damned nonsense. Ask Ethel. She knows. . . . Ethel! Ethel! Psh-h-h! I forgot. No, Ethel can't come. She's married. Happy, eh, what? Pish! never get married. A woman only wants clothes, hats, gewgaws."

Broadwood came and sat beside him awhile, watching this man for whom he would have sacrificed all his staff and remained content; hoping against hope, anxious to help, but powerless before the relentless approach shadowed by the doctor's message.

The day waned, lights sprang out and night drew on, still, since the morning, Norris had made no sign. He lay restlessly tossing on his pillow, muttering, and occasionally crying out for that woman who was married and could not come. Broadwood decided to stay in hospital, and thankfully rested until seven—then in the grey half-light a nurse approached—

"Come," she whispered, "it is the end. He is calling for Harris."

"Harris?"

"A typist apparently; he wishes to dictate a letter."

"A letter, . . . eh? . . . Yes, I will take it down."

Broadwood fumbled for his note-book, and looking to his pencil entered the ward.

"Harris!" came the voice, sharply irascible.

"Yes, sir."

"Where have you been? It's long past lunch-time. Got your tablets?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right. Take this down. It's a letter, leave a blank space; I'll fill it in with the name." There was a smile in his face as he spoke.

"I came down here," he said, "because it seemed the only thing to do if I wish to get fit—and there is the sun, which you don't get up north; and there is the sea, and if I want to gamble I can run over to Monte Carlo and . . . break the bank—or go to the devil in any way I choose. (Got that—tell me if I go too fast, eh, what?)"

Broadwood answered and Norris resumed. His eyes were closed. He rolled his head ceaselessly on the pillow, then with a swift contraction of the brows the tone changed.

"Lies!" he cried, "what am I talking of? 'Nothing. Worse. I am sick. These empty phrases are but a cloak to hide my misery. I am sick, Ethel, I'm going to die, and I want to square things up before I go. . . . Got that?'"

Again Broadwood acknowledged that he had written, and Norris resumed—

"The personal equation comes in there, you see. A man gets carved up a bit, and straightway he must tell the world of his sufferings. But there is nothing new in all this. What is there new? My dear, I will tell you."

Norris moved a trifle, half-lifting his head, and speaking very earnestly—

"A man's life is like a map marked all over with little cross-swords to show the battlefields on which he has fought. I have fought many, and I've got my ticket for the base. Marriage was one of the fights; death another; collision and courts of law, with Mr Solomon sitting in judgment, another; and then there was—cowardice. The greatest of them all was cowardice. . . . Got that?"

"And the greatest of them all was cowardice," said Broadwood, from behind the screen of a set face.

"Good. Well, I was a coward. I didn't know it when I married. That came after—when you guessed it. Oh, of course, you guessed it as those others did. Think I couldn't see? And yet—and yet I was so blind, so dense to what was coming, that I forgot the inevitable; lived only in the present, and got between cross-fires."

"That finished me. I got wiped out. Well, but what

*could I do?* You see, although *they* didn't understand, I thought perhaps you would. But you didn't, you know. Ethel, your face gave you away. It was cold—cold. . . . Oh, my darling, don't start back, don't palter with facts; I don't mean it unkindly. I only want to put things right before . . . before we—'turn down an empty glass'!

"My disgrace is mine. My sin is mine, and I must bear it. I love you, but I must never see you again. I love you, but never shall I dare trust pen to paper again, because they tell me you are married. Lies, of course! How could you be married while I am here? Ethel, come near—come near. There is a difficult place before me, a gulf that draws nearer, stealthily, solemnly nearer—and it is coming for me. So I have cried out to you, but there comes no answer—none. All black; all full of grotesques gibbering and mouthing—silent as the pit. Oh, my queen, my queen, there is a bitter agony-point in my path to-night, and I have fallen across it."

The voice ceased, and the hum of the wind droning in the ventilator filled the ward with sound. A long while Norris lay still, eyes closed, lips moving. Broadwood put down his notebook and watched, his lips very firm and compressed. It seemed that the end was upon them.

Then suddenly came the question, thrust out sharp, bringing him back to the business of his life—

"Got that? Eh—what?" And a moment later the voice began again—

"Do you know what it is like to die? Of course you don't. Well, I am dying, and I can tell you. Out there before me it is all mist; on my right there is mist, on my left mist—a grey world, Ethel, is rolling through space before me, and I am outside, standing in the mists. I desire to watch that grey ball, but a force greater than mine plucks me on. The ball passes from my sight, and I enter . . . I enter . . . a great open space thrilling with light—where respiration becomes . . . difficult . . . where I can no longer draw breath . . . where . . ."

The sick man struggled as he spoke. The words fell harshly, punctuated by the efforts he made to breathe; then



When again he opened them daylight was stealing over the towns lying shrouded in smoke and steam. It crept in at the tall windows and fell on the bed where Norris lay. He looked up, saw Broadwood, and essayed to stretch out one hand.

"Sorry to have given you all this bother," he said weakly.

"Never mind the bother," said Broadwood. "Where does Ethel live?—I want to send for her."

"Ethel?" he questioned, and a faint smile dawned. "Then I've been talking."

"You dictated a letter to her a while ago. I took it down. Let me send for her."

Norris watched him steadily. "A letter?" he questioned at length; "er . . . what sort . . . what did I say?"

Broadwood took out his tablets and read those sentences which spoke of Ethel, and leaned forward, searching the wan face regarding him so steadily from the pillow. "Let me send for her," he urged, stretching out one hand and laying it on the sick man's arm. "Come, where does she live?"

Again the flickering smile, then wistfully came the words, "Afraid . . . er . . . No, I don't think she could come."

He paused, examined Broadwood's face, read kindness there, caught a glimpse of his entreaty, and resumed with an air of finality, "No, my friend; I think that letter is one . . . which will be delivered . . . on the Day of Judgment. . . ."

Late that afternoon the crossing was made.

And the sun shone red over the cities lying there reeking on the banks of the Mersey.

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